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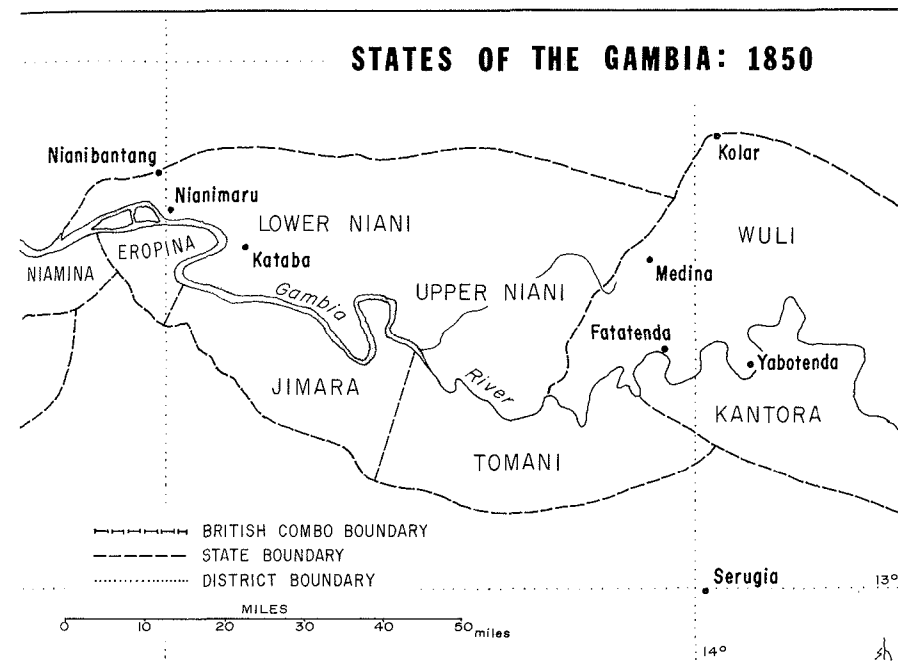
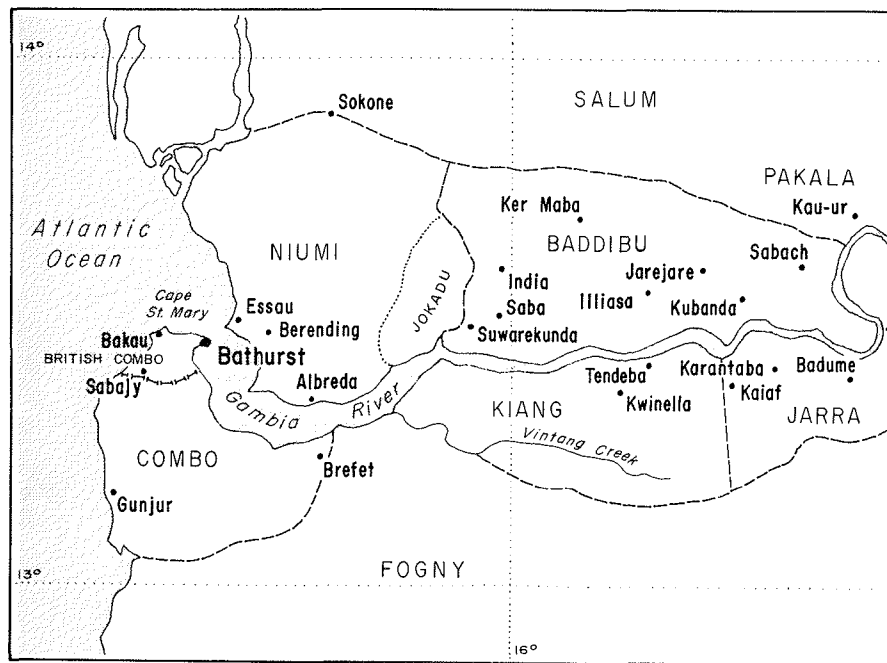
Mandingo Kingdoms of the Senegambia

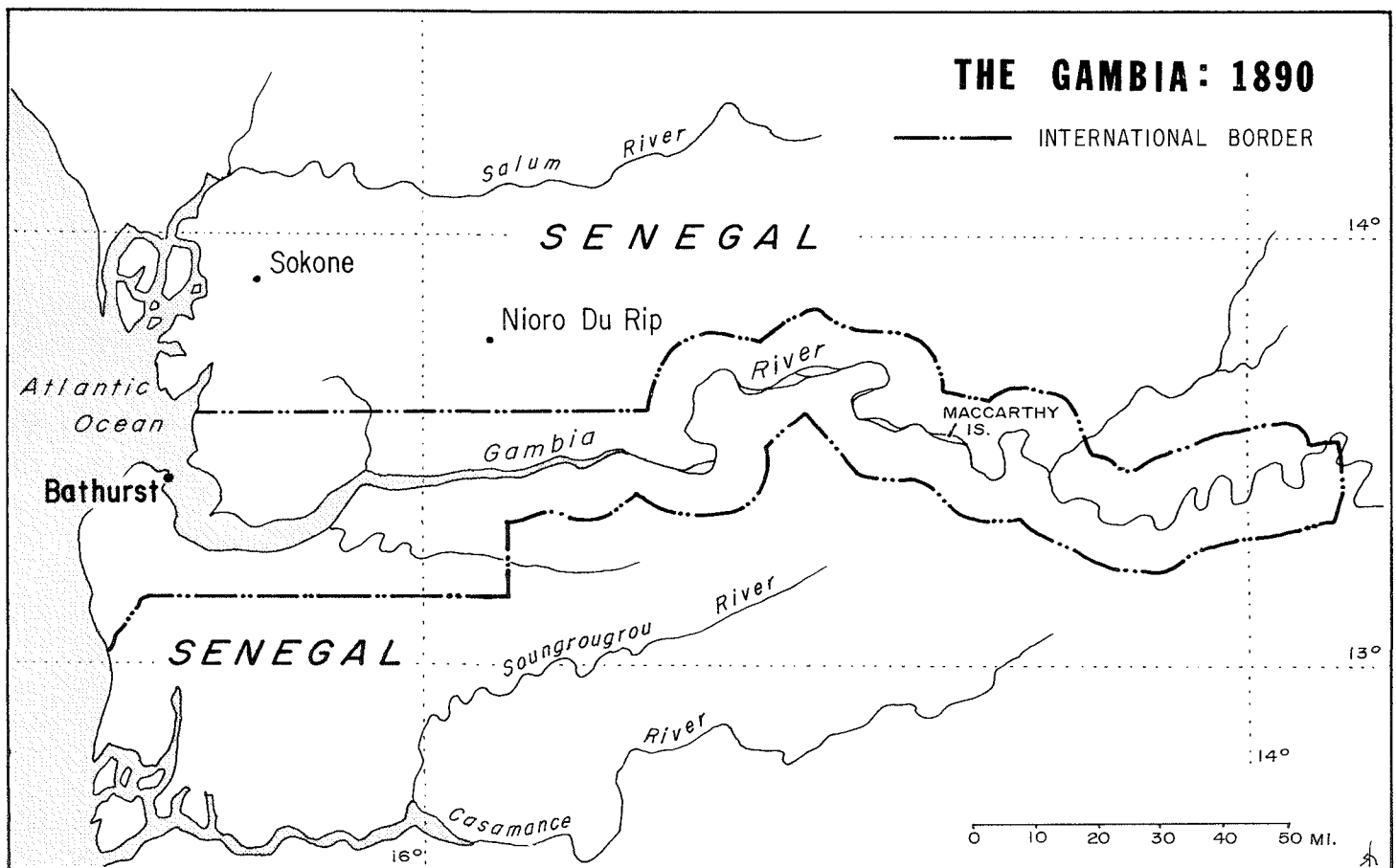
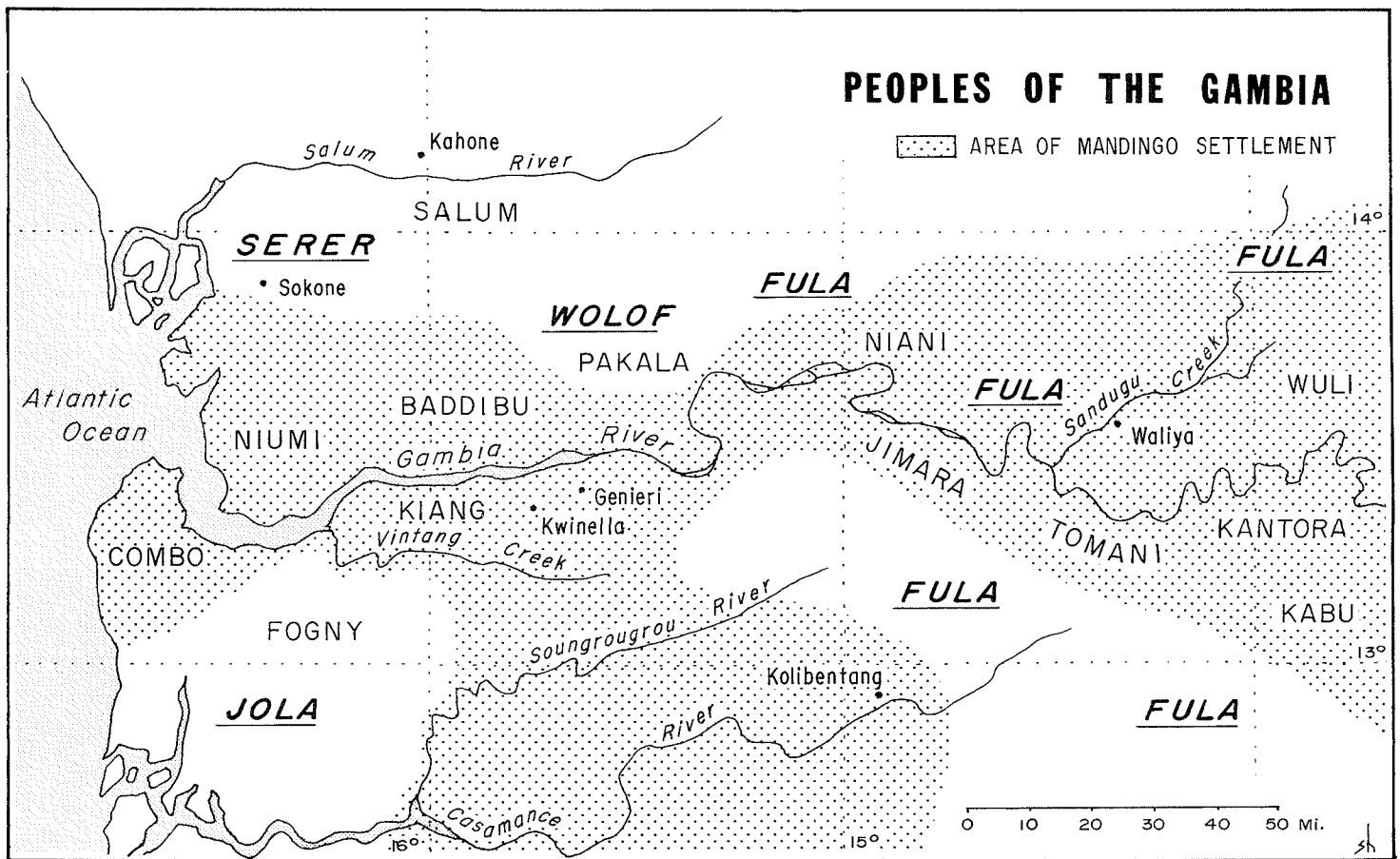
Traditionalism, Islam, and
European Expansion

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and political intervention of relevance considerably beyond nineteenth-century African history.

The Sources

When the research for this book was begun in 1964, little was known in the outside world of the Gambia Mandingo states. Even after 400 years of commercial contact and settlement Europeans had largely ignored even the most elementary facts of geography and social organization in the river kingdoms. A few studies of agriculture and trade along the Gambia had been published. Surveys made in nearby areas of Mande, Wolof, and Fula settlement shed some light on societies along the river. Nevertheless, the structures of the Mandingo states in the precolonial period, the revolutionary movement of the nineteenth century, and the interaction between animist, Muslim, and European protagonists in the Gambia have been considered only in passing if at all. Florence Mahoney's study, "Government and Opinion in the Gambia, 1816–1902," centers on the population of the colony at Bathurst, while J. M. Gray's *History of the Gambia* makes no secret of its European focus. Harry Gailey's volume does not go beyond Gray's for the nineteenth-century period. Martin Klein's *Islam and Imperialism in Senegal* discusses the Islamic movement in its later stages but concentrates on the Serer states north of the Gambia.¹

Despite the dearth of historical synthesis, sources for the study of the Mandingo kingdoms during the nineteenth century are plentiful. However, the reconstruction of social and political forms from this material poses much the same problem of mosaic as do Anglo-Saxon studies. Although the evidence may not include an eclectic assortment of "vellum, stone, whalebone or needlework,"² a variety of information from oral traditions, travelers' diaries, administrative records, and official correspondence in European archives contribute the pieces which must be fitted together.

The largest category of useful source material—judged by mass

1. Florence Mahoney, "Government and Opinion in the Gambia, 1816–1901," Ph.D. dissertation (University of London, 1963); J. M. Gray, *A History of the Gambia* (1940; New York, 1966); Harry Gailey, *A History of the Gambia* (London, 1964); Martin A. Klein, *Islam and Imperialism in Senegal* (Stanford, 1968).

2. Peter H. Blair, *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England* (Cambridge, 1962), p. vii.

and weight—is the official correspondence between European administrators in the Senegambia and ministries of the governments in London and Paris. The British correspondence is voluminous—over 100 large volumes of Colonial Office documents for the 1850–1900 period alone. Although the great majority of these documents focus on colonial affairs, they provide a valuable week-by-week chronology of certain categories of events and some insights into life in the river states. They include, for example, the only contemporary accounts of the Soninke-Marabout wars which have survived (although nineteenth-century Arabic manuscripts will undoubtedly come to light). Such phenomena as the involvement of Muslim leadership with the British early in the jihad, which is ignored or denied by the oral traditions, is documented at the time it occurred in February, 1861.

Like other categories of source materials, however, the British documents give a biased picture of local societies and their institutions. The administrators of the British settlements saw the colony locked in a struggle for survival with an emergent Muslim theocracy and attempted to convince a skeptical Colonial Office in London of the need to preserve traditional Mandingo structures, while destroying Islamic power. And although administrators, particularly in the 1850s and 1860s, traveled up the river as far as MacCarthy Island, they rarely went farther and never stopped anywhere for more than a few hours to talk with the kings and village chiefs of the Mandingo states or leaders of the Marabout party. For the most part the British administrators' response to African institutions and individuals was couched in the terms of European experience, with little or no concern for the realities of African society.

By contrast, although much less bulky, the French reports forwarded from St. Louis and Goree to Paris were often more perceptive. The French, however, were primarily concerned with districts under their direct rule or influence and paid relatively little attention during most of the century to institutions along the Gambia. Furthermore, their analysis, like that of the British, was frequently marred by anti-Muslim bias, notwithstanding the popular picture presented of Governor Faidherbe's tolerance of Islamic ideals. In fact, from nearly the beginning of the Gambian jihad Faidherbe was emphatically opposed to the spread of Mus-

lim hegemony and, if he was sincere in his written appraisal, found Maba to be no more than a fanatic troublemaker.³

Historical consciousness can be said to express itself through memories which are passed from one generation to another in the form of traditions. These are not casually assembled but reflect the significance a group assigns to particular events. Thus, much of the chronology and many structural features of Mandingo society in the nineteenth century are remembered by the non-European inhabitants of the valley today. There are still people who can report from first-hand experience events of the Muslim jihad in its later stages. In most cases, however, informants have gathered their information second- or third-hand from their fathers or grandfathers who themselves lived during the period.

Much of the oral evidence used for this book was obtained in 1965 on a trip to the Gambia after I had completed a year's work with archival and published sources in Europe. Generally my interviews were conducted with groups of informants, although in some cases individuals were interviewed alone. Sometimes the interviews continued for many hours, as these matters are approached with great gusto by the Mandingo. Quite aside from the historical and anecdotal value of the material they provided, this concern and enthusiasm for the project increased my own enthusiasm which a year in the archives had somewhat diminished. It would be difficult to remain indifferent to the interest shown by the chief of Kwinella, an important south-bank community, who came from his fields some distance away with the men of his village and stayed throughout half the day in intense and often heated discussion. Members of both sides in the Soninke-Marabout struggle had lived in the village, and their descendants contributed to the discussion.

Or again . . . to the evening at Sankwia, also on the south bank, when the village population gathered in a tight, silent circle around the *bentang* (palaver platform)⁴ with a candle held for

3. See for example Minutes of the Conseil d'Administration, Government of Senegal, session of 2 September 1864.

4. Nineteenth-century observers refer to both platform and meeting place as *bentang*. D. P. Gamble cites three versions of the word in contemporary usage: *bentengo* (platform); *bantango* (cotton tree); *bantaba* (village meeting place, often at a cotton tree) (personal communication, May, 1971).

light, while the imam of the village began his recollections of the events of eighty years ago with the phrase "only what I myself know and have seen will I tell you." The surrounding stillness was not broken until the end of the old man's recitation when the whole group erupted into a frenzy of congratulation and excitement.

It was rare that any version of an event was presented without question and discussion. Only in one Serahuli group was a single "official" version, subject only to *sotto voce* amendments by the village chief, presented in answer to questioning. Elsewhere, different points of view within the informant groups were argued at length, and in some cases with passion, by opposing factions.

Some informants were chosen for their family ties with leaders of the opposing groups during the Soninke-Marabout wars. Others, called together by the village or district chief, simply represented the most important family groups in the local community. Interviews were conducted with over 200 people (in groups and as individuals) of both Soninke and Marabout ancestry, from every one of the principal ethnic groupings, in all but one of the districts of the present state of Gambia.

An omission from the list of informants which is perhaps obvious to the reader is that of praise-singers, or *griots* whose profession it is to collect bardic tales, songs, and poems which honor their patrons and vilify their sponsors' enemies. A fascinating study in themselves, the *griots*' tales collected during 1965 proved to be less valuable for the history of Gambian Mandingo society than the traditions and memories of nonprofessional informants whose livelihood was not dependent on the aesthetic or hortatory virtues of their presentation.

This study draws as well upon traditions and ethnographic material recorded by local British officials earlier in the twentieth century. These documents were at one time in the Local Government Office and archives in Bathurst. In the 1940s David Gamble copied a number of these documents and left a typescript of them in the Local Government Office. Since then the originals have been destroyed by insects or have disappeared into private collections. The reports written by traveling commissioners and other members of the local administration with several years' experience in the area are valuable, as they were made before modernization

had substantially altered patterns of local organization and when the events of the nineteenth century were clearer in people's minds than they are today.

But, although the oral traditions gathered over the last 30 years are useful for the nineteenth-century period, one finds that much has been lost because of the erosion of time and the upheavals of the late nineteenth century. There are gaps in our knowledge, particularly concerning traditional animism and the relations of Africans with Europeans. Undoubtedly losses were caused in these two instances by the spread of Islam among the rural elites on the one hand and by the close relationship between district leaders and local British administrators on the other. The British still played an important part in the Local Government Office during the 1960s.

It is predictable that the bearers of tradition shape their accounts in such a way that the traces of the past must be found between the lines, in passing references, and in omissions. One chief, for example, chose to tell the history of the nineteenth-century religious wars in a framework of the story of Moses and the politics of the Red Sea in biblical times, beginning his tale with Adam and Eve early in the afternoon and reluctantly ending it with the destruction of Pharaoh's army some hours later. It was only as he escorted us out of the house that he casually told of the rivalries dividing his mother's town during the Soninke-Marabout wars and thus provided one of the most vivid vignettes that I came across.

It has been possible to consider the oral evidence and official correspondence within a framework of written sources dating back over the past 400 years. Since the fifteenth century travelers and traders from Europe have come to the Gambia to explore the river's resources and incidentally the customs of its people. Thus, as early as the sixteenth century Fernandes provided a brief but illuminating description of the mixture of animist and Islamic institutions in the Gambia states. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries travelers such as Richard Jobson and Francis Moore recorded in detail some of the more striking Mandingo institutions. In the nineteenth century two French travelers visited the Gambia—Hyacinte Hecquard in 1850 and André Rançon in 1891—on commissions from the French government to explore

the routes to the interior and the possibilities of French economic and political penetration. Their accounts of the Mandingo communities they visited, though incomplete, provide comparative material on the broad lines of state organization, bracketing the period of the Soninke-Marabout wars, and much valuable detail on the effects of the jihad at the village level.⁵ Thus, structures of local and supralocal organization which existed during the nineteenth century can be described.

It should be kept in mind that the sources outlined above and listed in detail in a bibliographical appendix represent the points of view (1) of descendants of nineteenth-century Soninke and Marabout leadership of either royal or free status, (2) of contemporary Europeans in the Senegambia, and (3) of alien travelers and scholars before and since the nineteenth century. It would be a valuable further step to record the traditions of both slave and "stranger" groups more fully. Perhaps quite a different picture of the Marabout leadership would emerge. Particularly useful would be a study of Wolof and Serahuli traditions. Furthermore, as documents written in Arabic begin to appear from Marabouts' private collections, and eventually they must, our assessment of the organization of Muslim communities and the state which emerged from the period of the wars will be enlarged.

Methodological Aspects

As a means of reconstructing the broad outlines of Mandingo society, a structural approach to political analysis has been found to be useful. Such an approach defines as corporate entities both groups and offices. Peter Lloyd, among others, has indicated the dangers inherent in structural-functional models which present a false illusion of perpetual equilibrium which "real" societies do not possess.⁶ Here in contrast to such equilibrium models, however, an emphasis is placed on the tensions within the Mandingo

5. Valentim Fernandes, *Description de la côte occidentale d'Afrique*, trans. T. Monod, A. Teixeira da Mota, R. Mauny (Bissau, 1951), p. 45; Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade* (1623; London, 1932); Francis Moore, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa* (London, 1738); Hyacinte Hecquard, *Voyage sur la côte et dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique occidentale* (Paris, 1855); André Rançon, *Dans la Haute-Gambie: voyage d'exploration scientifique 1891-1892* (Paris, 1894).

6. Peter Lloyd, "Conflict Theory and Yoruba Kingdoms," in *History and Social Anthropology*, ed. I. M. Lewis (London, 1968), pp. 25-61.

state system of the nineteenth century and the transfigurations these tensions produced. The structures of the society were clearly undergoing change throughout the period. Nevertheless, they were still functioning within an institutional framework which had persisted over a long period of time. Although the kings of the river states were losing ground politically as their clients, rival lineage leaders, and the heads of Muslim towns increasingly exercised powers traditionally reserved for the paramount, the institutions of authority—the kingship, the aristocratic clan system, succession patterns, etc.—were generally still in place and operating. That these dying institutions persisted, long after political power had been dispersed and generalized, was in fact stimulus to revolution in the river states.

M. G. Smith has argued that regulatory action which is the specific feature and function of government, always involves two analytically distinct elements, **authority and power**. These differ insofar as “authority is legitimated and identified by the rules, traditions and precedents which embody it,” while power is

neither fully prescribed nor governed by norms and rules. Whereas authority presumes and expresses normative consensus, power is most evident in conflict and contraposition, where dissensus obtains. In systems of public regulation, these conditions of consent and dissent inevitably concur, although they vary in their forms, objects and proportions. Such systems accordingly depend on the simultaneous exercise and interrelation of the power and authority with which they are identified.⁷

The interaction between the authority associated with the kingship and its ruling core clans and the power exercised by rival groups and institutions during the nineteenth century is the essence of the drama of the Gambia river states.

In considering the phases of the Marabout revolution and its causes I have consulted a segment of the vast literature of European and American revolutionary history. L. P. Edwards' introductory study, recently modified by Crane Brinton and Lawrence

7. M. G. Smith, “A Structural Approach to Comparative Politics,” in *Varieties of Political Theory*, ed. David Easton (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1966), p. 127.

Stone,⁸ has proved relevant to the Gambian situation where a ruling class, weak and in retreat, faced an economically prosperous but politically underprivileged segment of the population and at the moment of confrontation proved incapable of effectively putting down revolution by force.

The choice of European dates, which artificially punctuate a process that began before 1800 and continued after 1900, is no more than a convenient device. The year 1800 marked neither the end of traditional Soninke rule nor the beginning of the Marabout revolution. Although by 1900 a tentative international boundary had been established around the Gambia Valley, for the peoples living there the year had little meaning in terms of colonial rule. The initiatives of African groups along the river were by then temporarily bankrupt, but it was several years before a workable colonial administration could be set up in the British Protectorate and the precolonial era could really be said to have passed. **Nevertheless, the nineteenth century saw the decline of the traditional ruling classes along the Gambia, the rise of Islamic states, and the establishment of a European colonial presence in the Mandingo state system and is thus a logical period in which to consider these events.**

Acknowledgments

There are so many people to whom I am indebted for the materials of this book and I hold so many pleasant memories of each of them that an attempt to acknowledge their assistance is at the same time enjoyable in its associations and necessarily an exercise in drastic abbreviation.

From the beginning, the guidance of Leonard Thompson clarified the essential outlines into which the study must fall. John S. Galbraith read versions of the European section, and his encouragement and stringent training have from an early point shaped my approach to these materials. In making my synthesis of both documentary and oral materials I have been fundamentally indebted, as has a generation of students at the Uni-

8. L. P. Edwards, *The Natural History of Revolution* (Chicago, 1927); Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (New York, 1965); Lawrence Stone, “Theories of Revolution,” *World Politics*, XVIII, no. 2 (January, 1966), 159–76.

versity of California (Los Angeles), to Michael G. Smith, for his writings in anthropology and history, for his patience as a teacher, and for his perceptiveness as a critic.

David Gamble has shared freely his long linguistic and historical experience in the Gambia. I am grateful as well to Robert Griffith, Roland Oliver, and Humphrey Fisher for their reading of earlier versions of the manuscript.

There were so many residents of the Gambia who gave generously of their memories, time, and hospitality that it is impossible to thank them all. Among them I would like to mention particularly Chief Jere Sanyang (Kwinella), Ousman Jamma Ba (who was visiting Bathurst from Senegal), Chief Lamin Bande (Sankulikunda), Imam Iram Ba Fofana (Sankwia), Chief Sherif Jammeh (Farafeni), and Chief Landing Sonko (Sika), as well as Mr. M. J. Sambou (Kau-ur) who forwarded information to me later.

My trip through The Gambia would not have been possible on my limited budget without the intervention and planning of Florence Mahoney, Louise Njie (Department of Education), and M. D. Njie (Department of Information). The participation in my research of Stephen Bohoun (now Secretary, Public Records Committee), John Bishop (District Commissioner, Mansa Konko), Malcolm Clarke (Assistant District Commissioner, Kerewan), and James N'Dow (Headmaster, Armitage School, Georgetown) and his wife made many of my most productive interviews possible.

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The Fulbright Committee, the Regents of the University of California—and Frederick Quinn—provided financial support for much of the research and writing of this book, while at the same time allowing me complete freedom in my work.

Parts of this book have appeared previously in other forms.

Portions of the description of Mandingo society in Chapter 1 appeared in my article "Niumi: A Nineteenth Century Mandingo Kingdom" in *Africa*, XXXVIII (October, 1968). I wish to thank the International African Institute for permission to reprint excerpts from this article. Ethnographic data on the Fula in Chapter 1 are elaborated in my article "A Nineteenth-Century Fulbe State" in *Journal of African History*, XII (Fall, 1971). Permission to use portions of this data here has been granted by the *Journal of African History* and Cambridge University Press. Chapter 5 is revised and enlarged from "Maba Diakhou Ba: Scholar-Warrior of the Senegambia" which appeared first in *Tarikh* (October, 1968). It is reprinted here by permission of the Historical Society of Nigeria. This chapter in expanded form will appear in *Studies on the History of Islam*, edited by John Willis (London: Frank Cass, 1972).

Mandingo Kingdoms of the Senegambia

1

The River and the People

“The Gambia” is a label attached to a number of quite different things. It can refer to the Gambia River in West Africa which is one of the finest watercourses on the continent. Navigable for nearly 500 miles, it is a natural outlet for the products of the Senegambia, the large area drained by the Senegal and Gambia rivers. The sources of the Gambia lie near those of the Senegal high in the Futa Jalon in the present state of Guinea. Thus, the Gambia was historically associated with both the Western Sudan and the coastal forest; with the terminus of trans-Saharan trade routes, and with the fulcrum of the ancient empire of Mali, all of which contributed to making the Gambia Valley one of the principal areas of Mandingo settlement in Africa.

During the nineteenth century another “Gambia” appeared in the official correspondence of the British Colonial Office. This was the Crown Colony established to suppress the slave trade and to encourage “legitimate” commerce along the Gambia River. For most of the century this colony was little more than two small settlements on the river. Nevertheless it was important to both British and French interests seeking to control the hinterland and received an attention disproportionate to its size during certain periods of Europe’s expansion overseas.

Today, The Gambia is a sovereign political state, one of Africa’s independent nations, incorporating nearly 300 miles of the river’s banks. It has sometimes been described as an unworkable result of the European partition of Africa. Covering little more than 4,000 square miles, with a population of some 320,000, The Gam-

bia is one of the smallest nations in Africa—and in the world. Yet this area was once the nucleus of a viable and expansive African political system. For over 400 years a group of kingdoms clustered along the river's banks between the ocean and Barrakunda Falls, in the ethnographic and geographic frontier zone between the fringes of the tropical rainforest, lying deeply across the rest of the West African coast to the south, and the open savanna woodland stretching north to the Senegal. These kingdoms—Niumi, Baddibu, Upper and Lower Niani, and Wuli on the north bank; Combo, Fogny, Kiang, Jarra, Niamina, Eropina, Jimara, Tomani, and Kantora on the south—were distinguished from their neighbors by the predominance of their Mandingo-speaking populations, by the structure of their political organization, and by their river-oriented economies. Their combined area during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, about 6,000 square miles, roughly included the area of the modern state, though they spilled over at several points into what is now the Republic of Senegal.

The chapters that follow constitute a study of the political system which had evolved along the Gambia River as the Mandingo spread and consolidated their hold on the political and economic benefits of the river valley. The discussion focuses on three institutional groupings existing along the river at that time—traditional animist societies, Islamic communities, and European settlements—and the relationships existing among them. With this picture of institutional change in mind, the nineteenth century can usefully be divided into three periods: 1800–60; 1860–67; 1867–1901.

1 The first half of the century saw the decay of traditional ruling elites and the rise in each of the kingdoms of a revolutionary state-within-the-state. The Mandingo rulers and their followers were predominantly animist, but a growing minority within the riverside population was strongly Islamized and had incorporated along lines basically opposed to those of the ruling clans. As a wave of religious revival and currents of restless dissatisfaction swept through West African Islam, clan structures in these traditional Mandingo societies began to change, undergoing sharp conflict as clan strata emerged into broader social groupings.

2 In the 1860s the tensions arising out of these gradual changes erupted violently, and the Gambian Mandingo states faced the

most critical crisis in their long histories. In 1862 a revolt under the leadership of a Torodo (Fula) cleric, Maba Diakhrou, resulted in the expulsion of the ruling classes along the river and a tentative restructuring of society there. Clearly, the background of this revolution represented a fusion of the ideals of Muslim revival with the desires of a dissatisfied population. Together these provided the impetus that brought a violent revocation of the traditional Mandingo state system. Undoubtedly these wars represented an advance of Islam into the animist forest societies, but this advance cannot be divorced from the political program of the reform leaders, nor can it be understood without a clear picture of the society in which it appeared.

The Soninke-Marabout wars, as they were called, destroyed the traditional state system in the Gambia at a time when British and French communities in the Senegambia were extending their influence inland in search of trade and strategic routes to the Niger River Valley. A lengthy phase of instability within the revolutionary leadership and of attack from outside the state following Maba's death was terminated by the exhaustion of local initiatives and by the intervention of European powers in a colonial solution. The century came to an end with the pacification of the river states and the beginning of the colonial era, leaving the Senegambia dismembered and its economy crippled. Nevertheless, the wars of the nineteenth century had carried the seeds of social change far beyond the frontiers of the Gambia states and speeded the processes of Islamization which continue in the twentieth century.

The River

On its way to the sea from its sources in the Futa Jalon, the Gambia River cuts through a low sandstone plateau which decreases in height as it approaches the Atlantic. Some 300 miles from the ocean, near Barrakunda Falls, the river valley is narrow, its steep banks rising as much as 30 feet above the water. The valley widens as it nears the coast, and its sides are lower and gently sloping.

Although the soils of the valley close to the river are fertile and are flooded during the rainy season, the river's banks are generally unsuitable for agriculture, choked at their lowest level by thick

mangrove swamps and inundated by tidal salt water nearly 100 miles from the sea. Patterns of settlement and agriculture tend to follow zones parallel to the river where arable land is easily accessible. Villages cluster between the banks and the open savanna of the Senegambian Plateau to the north and between the river and the dense rainforest to the south.

Thus, settlements on the north bank were open to the spread of population and ideas from the north where the plateau merged imperceptibly into the Sahel and southern Sahara. To the south the fringes of the tropical rainforest and adverse winds and currents off the coast discouraged long-distance migration or easy communications, although this barrier modified near Barrakunda Falls where the northern savanna curves across the river valley toward the southeast.

The Gambia has a "drier tropical climate," and its seasonal pattern is dominated by a dry period from September to June (at its longest). Rainfall during the year is extremely uncertain. The arrival of the first rains may be delayed by as much as two months, and the total volume will vary as much as thirty inches from one year to another. Temperatures in the interior away from the moderating influence of the sea may be 20 degrees higher than those of the coast at times during the year.

Although there was a variety of foods available, unproductive methods of planting and uncertain rainfall meant that famine was a continuing theme of life during the nineteenth century. The "hungry season" generally lasted through August and September, between the maize (corn) and millet (*coos*) harvests. If the millet crop failed, it could continue longer. Wuli, a north-bank state near Barrakunda Falls, was one of the most fertile areas along the river and had an exceptionally heavy average rainfall for the Gambia. Nevertheless, the food crop was generally consumed within a month of its gathering. People starved during the rainy season, though the towns were surrounded by cultivated fields and caravans passed frequently.¹

The chief subsistence crops grown along the river have not changed very much over the last 300 years. Rice, grown and harvested by women, was planted in fresh-water swamps in the river

1. André Rançon, *Dans la Haute-Gambie: voyage d'exploration scientifique, 1891-1892* (Paris, 1894), p. 17.

valley, chiefly in the region midway between the falls and the sea. Individual dwellings had small vegetable and fruit gardens and scattered around the towns and villages, and in the uplands outside the valley, were strip farms of millet and corn. These grains were harvested by the men who occasionally supplemented the food crops with elephant or antelope meat, game birds, or fish.

Pasturage drew nomadic populations to the river; by the eighteenth century they had drifted into every kingdom along the Gambia, selling milk and other cattle products. Even the settled populations kept herds. Cattle were considered a mark of wealth and status and were rarely used for meat. However, historically, cattle have suffered in the river region from rinderpest, tsetse-borne trypanosomiasis, and lack of fresh water.

Trade

Over the centuries, the Gambia attracted trade moving between the interior Sudan and the sea. Before Europeans established themselves on the coast, the area at the river's mouth was a center for trade in salt refined from the brackish river water in calabashes exposed to the sun. The salt was transported by canoe as far as Barrakunda Falls and from there eastward on asses overland. One reads of caravans by 1620 of as many as 300 asses bringing cloth, hides, ivory, and ornaments of brass of British origin which had crossed the Sahara. These items were exchanged for salt at the river ports below the falls.

Tenda, the area of the river beyond Barrakunda Falls, was vaguely referred to by the people near the river's mouth as Dyula country because of the numbers of Dyula said to be settled and trading there.² Europeans at one time thought this district was a source of West African gold, but an English expedition in 1620-21 found little gold and few habitations near the river in Tenda, though a flourishing trade between the interior and the coast in slaves, salt, beeswax, and hides passed through the region.³

Tenda commercial enterprises, ultimately dependent on the

2. In the Gambia, *Dyula* had a professional meaning: one was a Dyula when one traded. There, as elsewhere in West Africa, the term was particularly associated with the Mande traders. *Dyula* should not be confused with *Jola* (Fr.: Diola), an ethnic group living between the Gambia and the Casamance rivers and discussed later in this chapter.

3. Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade* (1623; London, 1932), p. 114.

fortunes of Timbuktu, Gao, and Jenne, the great trading towns on the Upper Niger, had already begun to decline. The blow dealt to the Songhay Empire by the invasion of a Moroccan army from the north was followed by disorder along the western trans-Saharan routes which eventually diverted traffic to the east, to Kano and Waday. Tuareg, Bambara, and Fula began to compete for control of the Niger Valley and to drive Mande Dyula from the region. New states emerged to the east of the Gambia, and the Bambara kingdoms of Segou and Kaarta became the eastern limits of trade for the Gambia states. Gradually the Tenda traffic was reduced to a trickle. By the nineteenth century only one caravan a year was able to cross the western Sahara. The once-busy river outlets just below the falls in Kantora and Wuli were almost deserted.⁴

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, this ailing trade to the east, so important to the states of the Upper Gambia, had been overshadowed by the great growth of the trade in slaves across the Atlantic. Every year numbers of Bambara merchants and Mande Dyula brought slaves to the Gambia River ports to exchange at the European factories for manufactured goods—arms and ammunition, ironware, tobacco, alcohol, and cloth. The slaves were transhipped from Salum, Niumi, or Vintang in Fogny to James Island or Albreda, the principal European stations, and from there across the ocean. During the height of the trade in the seventeenth century some 5,000 to 6,000 slaves a year were estimated to have been exported from the Gambia.⁵ However, the slave trade never reached the proportions it did farther south along the African coast, and it declined during the eighteenth century due to the excessive free-trade competition between European merchants. High prices demanded by African suppliers drastically reduced the trade even before its abolition by the British at the beginning of the nineteenth century.⁶

Nevertheless, the slave trade provided revenues for the Gam-

4. A. A. Boahen, *Britain, The Sahara and the Western Sudan, 1788–1861* (Oxford, 1964), p. 103 ff.; Anne Raffinel, *Voyage dans l'Afrique occidentale 1843–1844*. (Paris, 1846), pp. 482–83.

5. Thomas Thurloe to Royal African Company, Gambia, 15 March 1677, in *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, ed. Elizabeth Donnan, 4 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1930), I, 234.

6. Mungo Park, *Travels of Mungo Park*, ed. Ronald Miller (1795; London,

bian kingdoms. Debtors and criminals were sold to the Europeans, and raids were organized on neighboring states. Caravans, traders, and European factors paid a variety of taxes and tribute to village and state officials—as much as the trade would bear. These revenues played an important part in shaping the politics of the river states during the eighteenth century.

Neither the British proclamation of 1807 abolishing slaving nor the establishment of a military post at the mouth of the river to enforce the proclamation succeeded in entirely destroying the trade. Nevertheless the economy of the Gambia was dominated thereafter by Europe's search for a respectable substitute. For almost 40 years nothing appeared.

Then in the 1840s, the thin, sandy soil of the savanna bushland flanking the river valley proved favorable to an import from Brazil which had come to West Africa via the slave barracoons. In 1850, 19,000 tons of groundnuts (peanuts) were exported to Europe.⁷ From the beginning, groundnuts were grown almost entirely by independent African peasant producers on land to which they had access by membership in a community or which, if they were strangers, was leased to them by the village chief. As profits increased, more and more people from the north and east of the Gambia were attracted to the river for seasonal or permanent employment.

The People

Living along the Gambia River by 1800 was a heterogeneous population which included Fula, Wolof, Jola, Serahuli, and Man-

1954), p. 18; Donnan, I, 421. "Report of the Committee of the Privy Council on the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1789, testimony of John Norris, rector of St. Mary Woolnoth, who carried slaves to Carolina" contained an estimate on the export of slaves from Africa in that year: Gambia—700; Isles de Los—1,500; Sierra Leone to Cape Mount—2,000; Cape Mount to Cape Palmas—3,000; and so on down the coast. Of the total, 74,000, Norris claimed Britain purchased some 38,000; France, 20,000; Holland, 4,000; Denmark, 2,000; Portugal, 10,000 (in Donnan, II, 598n). Sylvain Golberry, a Frenchman eager to promote France's colonial expansion, estimated that British traders still took 3,000 slaves yearly from the Gambia in the 1780s (Golberry, *Fragments d'un voyage en Afrique*, 2 vols. [Paris, 1802], II, 209). Studies made of actual cargo figures on Liverpool slavers trading in the Gambia in 1752 bring the total for them alone to some 1,470 slaves, indicating a higher export during the eighteenth century than some of the estimates above (Gomer Williams, *History of the Liverpool Privateers and Letters of Marque* [London, 1897], pp. 675–77).

7. CO/87/50, MacDonnell to Grey, 1 May 1851. See also Chapter 4.

dingo.⁸ A traveler visiting the river districts at that time would have passed large Mandingo villages, enclosed in high reed or mud walls—the huts inside grouped around an open square—and generally situated near swampy land suitable for growing rice. Soon, if he were in the Salum area of the north bank, he might come to a small, compact Wolof hamlet. Within a few hours he might pass a Serahuli traders' village or a pastoral Fula camp, stockaded to contain cattle overnight, with temporary straw huts lining a central "avenue."

There were many Dyula villages on the north bank, set at the junction of routes from north and east. Jola communities on the south bank were scattered in hamlets through the forest, except where they bordered on Mandingo territory. There they formed compact defensive villages to protect themselves from Mandingo raids. South-bank Fula towns were often large, walled communities from which bands of armed men could raid neighboring Mandingo, Jola, and pastoral Fula settlements. Mandingo villages dominated both north and south banks. On the north they were interspersed with Fula and Wolof settlements, on the south with Fula and Jola villages.

Many Mandingo had come to the Gambia during the expansion of the Mali Empire in the fourteenth century. According to oral traditions, warrior bands pushed west from Manding down a number of watercourses to the sea, overrunning the peoples settled between the Casamance and Gambia rivers. Many Jola moved south away from the Gambia under this pressure, and Serer speakers moved north from the same region across the Gambia toward the Senegal. The first Portuguese explorers in the fifteenth century found Mandingo "kings" on the river who claimed to be vassals of the king of "Melle." In 1620, Richard Jobson reported

8. The Portuguese who had settled along the Gambia and established an important middleman position during the days of the slave trade had extensively intermarried with the local populations and by the nineteenth century seem to have almost disappeared as a distinguishable ethnic group in the populations of the river's banks. However, the Creole language which they introduced remained a trading language in the river states (Francis Moore, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa* [London, 1738], pp. 29, 49; A. W. Mitchinson, *The Expiring Continent* [London, 1881], p. 421 ff.; Florence Mahoney, "Government and Opinion in The Gambia," Ph.D. dissertation [University of London, 1963], p. 14).

that the Mandingo were "Lords and Commaunders" of all the Gambia.⁹

Associated with this spread of warrior-agriculturalist groups was the dispersal of Dyula trading groups from Manding. These traders organized themselves into commercial corporations and spread out through West Africa from Hausaland to the Senegambia. The network of trading communities established in connection with their enterprises covered both banks of the Gambia River. Thus, by the eighteenth century, reflecting both the predominance of the Mandingo segment of the riverside population and the adaptability of their culture, one could travel from the ocean to Barrakunda Falls speaking Mandingo all the way.¹⁰

Until the middle of the nineteenth century the villages and towns along the Gambia were under the overall authority of Mandingo kings and their councils, ruling in fourteen small states along the banks of the river. The organization of these states was based on, and reproduced on a larger scale, the structure of Mandingo society at the local level.

Mandingo Society

The majority of the Mandingo (who numbered perhaps some 90,000 people) lived in large compact settlements.¹¹ Village popu-

9. D. Bayley, "Early History [of the Gambia]," 1939, Archives of the Gambia; H. F. Reeve, *The Gambia, Its History, Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern* (London, 1912), p. 37; Jobson, p. 51. According to one frequently quoted tradition, in the tenth year of the Hegira, Amari Sonko, a Mandingo warrior from Manding, established himself overlord in what were to be the kingdoms of Niumi and Baddibu after defeating the king of Salum who claimed to rule the area. After Amari's death his Gambian territories were divided among his three sons, and it was his descendants who ruled in Niumi until the death of Demba Sonko in 1862 (Golberry, p. 159). Other versions of the history of Niumi's kingship are outlined in Chapter 2.

10. Moore, p. 39. The Mandingo speak a Mande dialect of the Niger-Congo family of languages. See Joseph H. Greenberg, "The Languages of Africa," in *International Journal of American Linguistics*, XXIX, no. 1, part 2 (January, 1968), 8; and W. E. Welmers, *The Mande Languages*, Georgetown University Monograph Series, no. 2 (Washington, D.C., 1958), pp. 9-24.

11. The description of Mandingo life in the nineteenth century which follows is drawn from Gambian, British, and French archives; from interviews in the field; and from travelers' and administrators' published accounts—the full range of materials referred to in the Preface. Hitherto there has been no synthesis of this body of data. The bibliography at the end of the book includes the relevant material. Because of the wide variety of sources utilized and limitations of space

lations were estimated to be as high as 3,000 people. Internal segments (compounds and wards) within these settlements were enclosed. Between them wound labyrinthine alleys opening through occasional doors into small yards.

A primary level of segmentation of the village community was the family compound, containing an extended-family group whose members farmed land assigned to their use. The women cultivated rice, the men, grain and groundnuts, although in the principal trading areas, such as Niumi, Jarra, and Combo, free-men rarely farmed, leaving the cultivation of their fields to women or slaves.

The senior man in the compound arbitrated internal disputes and represented the group in the lineage or ward council. It was he who sacrificed to ancestors and other spirits on behalf of the group.

Family groups were gathered into wards (*kabilolu*; sing., *kabilo*) inhabited by patrilineal kin, emphasizing mutual solidarity between members of the male line. Thus people living within the same *kabilo* generally bore the same clan surname, although in large and complex wards there were also a number of strangers and slaves, unrelated to the founding lineage and holding an inferior status.¹²

The stability of the Mandingo *kabilo* was reinforced by a preference for marriage by cross-cousins in the patrilineal line (marriage was forbidden between uterine cousins) and by virilocal rules of residence. A man's strongest social identity—before conversion to Islam—seems to have been that of his lineage. Studies made in the days of the British Protectorate indicate that the *kabilo* was the unit upon which a man could call for support in vengeance and feud, and a fine would be paid by the ward if an individual were unable to afford it.¹³

and the reader's patience, references in the text have been kept to a minimum. See also Charlotte A. Quinn, "Niumi: A Nineteenth-Century Mandingo Kingdom," in *Africa*, XXXVIII (1968), 443–55.

12. D. Bayley, "Kabilo [in Mandingo Society]," 1939, Archives of the Gambia (1939); Hyacinte Hecquard, *Voyage sur la côte et dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique occidentale* (Paris, 1855), p. 173; William Gray and Staff Surgeon Doehard, *Travels in Western Africa* (London, 1825), p. 67; M. R. Haswell, *Economics of Agriculture in a Savannah Village* (London, 1953), p. 15.

13. D. Bayley, "Kabilo," 1939, Archives of the Gambia; H. Lloyd Pryce, "Sandu and Wuli" [traveling commissioner's report], 1900, Archives of the Gambia;

Kabilo leadership was associated with rights to the land and was passed collaterally within the lineage segment claiming to have first received these rights. Authority within the *kabilo* was of much the same quality as that exercised by compound heads and by the head of the village over the community as a whole. However, village land could only be assigned to newcomers with the permission of *kabilo* leaders, and age groups used for communal labor were under their authority.

During the nineteenth century, leadership of a village, as of a *kabilo*, was generally held by the senior man of the senior branch of the line claiming direct descent from the original founder-settler of the community. His Mandingo title was *sate-tio*—literally owner of the land—but by the middle of the century he was often referred to as *alkali* instead.¹⁴ The alkali was important to contemporary European observers who as travelers and traders depended upon his support.¹⁵

During the first half of the nineteenth century, depending upon the means at his disposal, an alkali was able to demand a more or less considerable levy on goods belonging to traders or travelers passing through his district. He also collected fines in cases which he judged in council and kept a small tax from strangers leasing village lands. If there were no inheritors for a property it went to the village chief.

The alkali's authority was limited by a council of free compound leaders of the village, and he governed with their advice. Only with their consent could he assign usufructuary rights to land, recruit age-groups for public labor, collect taxes to be sent to the king, and mediate disputes that were referred to him within

P. Holderer, "Coutume Mandingue du Ouli," in *Coutumiers Juridiques de l'Afrique Occidentale Française*, I, Sénégal (Paris, 1939), 335.

14. See L. A. W. Brooks, "Historical Report, North Bank Province," 1932, Archives of the Gambia.

15. Francis Moore, a Royal Africa Company factor at the beginning of the eighteenth century, wrote that the alkali "hath a great Power. . . [he] appoints the Labour of all the People . . . and has the first Voice in all Conferences, concerning Things belonging to his Town. If a Person wants any Thing to be done by a good Number of People, the best Way is to apply to the Alcade. . . but if a Factor does not take Care to keep in with the Alcade, he will seldom or never get Things done as they ought to be. The Alcade's is a very beneficial Place, for both the Company and separate Traders pay a Custom for every Slave they buy, sometimes one Barr *per* Head, sometimes not so much, but that is according to the Place you are at" (Moore, pp. 127–28).

the village. During public trials at which he officiated both sides presented evidence, witnesses were cross-examined, and decisions were arrived at with the approval of the surrounding audience. If the people of the town were animist the decision was expressed in the context of "ancient custom"; but by the mid-nineteenth century Islamic law was widely referred to. The alkali was also the ritual leader of the village, and outside the town walls the burial places of the principal ancestors were honored as an integral part of the living community.

Usually there was a *bentang* in the village, a platform where public affairs were transacted, daily gossip exchanged by the men, and trials were conducted. This and other public properties (mosque, burial grounds, walls, etc.) were kept in order by an age-group of men (*kafo*) organized on a village-wide basis.

Although the leader (*kafu-tio*) of each of the four grades through which the men passed was popularly elected by the membership, these leaders were closely tied to the structure of lineage authority in the village. The alkali was often head of the highest grade, and the *kafo* which maintained public properties was directed by the ward leaders.

The *kafu-tio* of the senior age-set was sometimes called *borikuntio*.¹⁶ In Mandingo *bori* or *boli* refers to an object "consecrated to a spirit," a fetish.¹⁷ As elsewhere in Mande-speaking communities, the cult of the *bori* in the Gambian Mandingo villages was associated with secret societies of initiates characterized by an elaborate cosmology, ritual, and strong feelings of solidarity within the group. It was associated with circumcision and the organization of age-groups. Women and uncircumcised boys were excluded from membership and forbidden to view the cult symbol which was draped in cloth and carried in processions of the initiates through the villages at night. Its name, *Hore*, was the greatest oath a Mandingo could utter. Initiates spoke a secret language and participated in a period of several weeks' initiation after circumcision in an area outside each town sacred to the cult. During this time the cry of *Hore* was heard at night and was said to drive

evil spirits away. Smiths, who performed circumcisions, and praise-singers, both members of caste groups, were said to be intimates of *Hore*. Only those freemen who had passed through these schools could hold office in the traditional Mandingo communities.

There are indications that the cult occasionally transcended local village organization. At the beginning of the eighteenth century armed men from the towns of Albreda and Jillifry carrying a *Hore* figure went through Niumi proclaiming that the spirit had come to bring justice and restore order which had been banished by civil authorities, notably the king and his entourage. There had been widespread complaints to European observers that the king's clients had been taking slaves from their owners to sell for the king's profit. The protest movement soon became so widespread among both animists and Muslims in Niumi that it seemed to French traders living in Albreda that the king would be overthrown. Concerned with the maintenance of order for the good of trade, the French intervened and destroyed the cult object. Unfortunately, there is no record of what followed in this foreshadowing of the revolution to come.¹⁸

The Mandingo were divided into three endogamous castes: freeborn members of a lineage (*Foro*), whose social organization has been described above; slaves (*Jongo*); and artisans and praise-singers (*Nyamalo*). There were large numbers of slaves living within the river states during the nineteenth century. Mungo Park estimated that they formed over half the population, and villages of several hundred were attached to Mandingo towns along the river.¹⁹ In the Gambia, as elsewhere in West Africa, a distinction was made between captives, criminals, and debtors taken or bought into slavery and those slaves resident for two or more generations in a single community. Many of the slaves in the first category were aliens brought from the interior and were considered to be little more than trade goods.²⁰ Those of the second category were often given Mandingo names at birth (the

18. Jean Baptiste Labat, *Nouvelle relation de l'Afrique occidentale*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1728), IV, 380 ff.

19. Park, p. 16; Moore, p. 43.

20. Moore, pp. 42-43; Park, p. 16; H. Lloyd Pryce, "Sandu and Wuli," 1900, Archives of the Gambia.

16. K. L. Little, "The Organization of Communal Farms in the Gambia," *Journal of African Administration*, I, no. 2 (1949), 77.

17. J. S. Trimingham, *Islam in West Africa* (London, 1964), p. 236.

family surname and a first name which was used only for slaves—such as Ajuma for boys, Maladu for girls).²¹ These slaves could not be sold elsewhere or killed without a public trial. Slaves in this category were able to work a certain number of days a week for themselves and occasionally accumulated greater wealth than their masters. Sometimes they could buy their own freedom. Such slaves could hold positions of considerable responsibility. In Wuli the king's chief advisers were slaves, and in Niumi the king's head slave collected the state's customs from European traders.²²

The Nyamalo (which included praise-singers, smiths, leather-workers, and potters) could hold commissions as ambassadors for the kings, and in the nineteenth century members of this caste often acquired considerable wealth. They could intervene on behalf of members of any caste before the village courts and were ritually important to the community as conservers of traditions (praise-singers) and circumcisers (smiths). Nevertheless, these distinctions operated to bar members of the inferior castes from certain economic and social privileges within the community such as ownership of land, political office, and the tax revenues and benefits associated with holding office.²³ Some of the revolutionary leadership of the jihad was to come from these unprivileged classes.

In her study of Genieri, a village in Kiang East district, once part of the south-bank kingdom of Kiang, M. R. Haswell found that as late as the 1960s those who claimed to be direct descendants of the original founders of the village had favored social, economic, and political status and held rights of ownership to the lands best for tillage. Families who settled later, though long resident, were still considered strangers.²⁴

Genieri was founded by a Mandingo family called Sane which had come from Kabu about the beginning of the nineteenth century. Mamba Sane, the original settler, a man of legendary wis-

21. See Pryce, "Sandu and Wuli."

22. Moore, p. 110; K. L. Little, *The Mende of Sierra Leone* (London, 1951), p. 38. For slaves holding positions of responsibility, see J. M. Gray, *A History of the Gambia* (1940; New York, 1966), p. 14; CO/87/66, O'Connor to Labouchere, 4 March 1858.

23. Holderer, p. 333; D. Bayley, "Castes," 1939, Archives of the Gambia.

24. Haswell *Economics of Agriculture*; and Haswell, *The Changing Pattern of Economic Activity in a Gambia Village* (London, 1963).

dom, was succeeded by one of his four sons as head of the community.

As the settlement grew distant groups of relatives—Sonkos, Manes and Sagnias—joined the Sanes. Later slaves were settled in the community, and a family of smiths came to the village and were encouraged to stay in order to supply the people with weapons. The descendants of these slaves and strangers generally have not acquired ownership rights in the arable lands near the village, though they may apply to the heads of the founder lineages for their use. Sonkos, Manes and Sagnias, though related to the Sanes, are considered "strangers" by the direct descendants of the founder-settler family. Thus the village population has been charted to show a core of descendants of founder-settlers in each *kabilo* who "owned" the ward, with slave and "stranger" compounds clustered around them. These core lineages and their senior members had access to revenues which reinforced their privileged position. Some of these lineages with traditions of direct descent from founder-settler ancestors claimed paramount rights of land ownership over the whole state.²⁵

This then in essence was the structure of much of traditional, animist Mandingo society in the early years of the nineteenth century. It was a pattern which had been reported since the seventeenth century and which must have existed before that.²⁶

The Fula

There were, however, peoples other than the Mandingo living within the Gambia states, and these had preserved a considerable

25. See Chapter 2.

26. Haswell, *Economics of Agriculture*, pp. 13, 20–21; D. P. Gamble, "How Jenyer Is Related to Other Villages," 1949, Jenyer materials, Archives of the Gambia. The structure of these Mandingo societies resembled those of ancient Prussia and of Greece among others, a structure which Paul Kirchoff has conceptualized in conical form, "the whole tribe being one such cone, with the legendary ancestor at its top. . . within it are a larger or smaller number of similar cones, the top of each coinciding with or being connected with the top of the whole cone," the whole having the same structure as the component parts. One of the characteristics of such an organization is that all important economic, social, and religious functions are reserved for the core or "*aristoi*" group. Kirchoff has found what he describes as an evolutionary tendency in such societies toward a rigid stratification resulting in sharp conflicts of interest between the strata. Eventually such tensions evolve into a class struggle which "overshadows the old principles of clanship and finally leads to the breakup of the clan" ("The Principles

degree of ethnic identity. Before the wars of the second half of the nineteenth century and European intervention, these strangers on the fringes of Mandingo society had no political privileges outside their own communities nor did they have free access to the economic benefits which the Gambia Valley provided. Relations between these groups and with the Mandingo varied in character. In some cases non-Mandingo were able to establish a considerable degree of local autonomy for their communities, in others they were highly vulnerable to the demands of Mandingo authorities. In some cases a successful symbiotic relationship was maintained, in others friction was so great that it provoked violence.

The largest of these groups was the Fula who had been moving into the Gambia region for a long time and who lived in scattered settlements on both banks of the river. In the nineteenth century their greatest concentrations were in the kingdoms of the upper river: Wuli, Niani, Kantora, Tomani, and Jimara.

In the fifteenth century Portuguese in Senegal reported that they had come in contact with Fula from the Futa Jalon south of the Gambia. In the sixteenth century, a group of these Fula, under a leader named Koli Tengella, crossed the Gambia and conquered Mandingo territories in Bondu; they established the Denianke dynasty in the Futa Toro, and it ruled for two centuries. This migration is remembered as an exodus. It was said that the army was so large that the streams which it crossed were drunk dry by the men and their horses and cattle. This early movement was followed by four centuries of migrations into the Senegambia from the south, east, and north, which have left the Gambia in the midst of one of the densest areas of Fula settlement in West Africa.²⁷

By the 1700s Fula were to be found in every kingdom along the river. Although we know that they numbered over 40,000 in the 1960s, and that the size of the Gambian herds has been estimated at over 100,000 head, any estimate of the size of such a mobile population a century ago would be difficult. Nevertheless, maps

of Clanship in Human Society," in Morton Fried, ed., *Readings in Anthropology*, 2 vols. [New York, 1959], II, 259-70).

27. D. J. Stenning, *Savannah Nomads* (London, 1959), p. 1. The Fula migrations are discussed in Reeve, p. 39; J. -L. Boutillier et al., eds., *La moyenne vallée du Sénégal: étude socio-économique* (Paris, 1962), p. 16; J. S. Trimingham, *A History of Islam in West Africa* (London, 1962), p. 151.

from the eighteenth century show Fula settlements scattered throughout the Mandingo states, ranging in size from a cluster of a few huts to villages of one or two thousand people.²⁸

The Fula speak dialects of the West Atlantic group of the Niger-Congo family of languages. Nine dialects have been identified, reflecting different areas of origin, periods of arrival, and considerable cultural diversity within the Fula population as a whole.²⁹ By the nineteenth century many Fula spoke Arabic as well.

Politically, the most important of the Fula dialect groups during the nineteenth century were the Fulbe Firdu (M: Jawar-angko), the Torodo (M: Toranko), and Fulbe Futo (M: Futangke). Throughout the century the Fulbe Firdu pushed into Tomani and Jimara districts from the southeast (Kabu and the Futa Jalon). They are now the largest Fula group in the Gambia, numbering some 30,000 people. Semisedentary and heavily intermarried with other ethnic groups, they were looked down upon by "purer" nomadic Fula, who still refer to them as of slave origin.³⁰

Another Fula group important in nineteenth-century Gambia politics was the Torodo (M: Toranko) from Futa Toro who came to Wuli, Niani, Baddibu, and the south-bank districts during the century. Their principal settlement in Upper Niani survived the later wars of religion relatively undisturbed. Under the leadership of their chief, Maka Sise, they settled with the permission of the Mandingo chief of Sandugu district at Niankui near the mouth of a large creek and were joined there by others from the Futa. The Mandingo continued to give them land to use, and they built Dinkirai, a town with a solid fortified wall, generally the jealously guarded prerogative of a Mandingo king's town alone. Half a dozen satellite villages grew up under Maka Sise's authority. In time another Torodo leader from Futa Toro, Usman Sali, established himself nearby, at Walia, with his family and a few

28. Moore, p. 30; Colonial Office, *Gambia 1962 and 1963* (London, 1964), p. 120; H. R. Jarrett, *A Geography of Sierra Leone and Gambia* (London, 1964), p. 42.

29. In the Gambia these dialects fall into three general linguistic groupings: (1) *Fulbe Firdu*, *Jombonko*, *Habobe*, *Rorobe*, *Hamanabi*; (2) *Torodo*, *Jawando*, *Labo*; (3) *Fulbe Futo*. See D. Bayley, "Notes on the Ethnological Division of the Fulas," 27 September 1939, Archives of the Gambia. C. Daryll Forde, *Report on the Need for Ethnographic and Sociological Research in the Gambia* (Bathurst, 1945), pp. 12-15. For a general classification of Fula languages see Greenberg, p. 24 ff.

30. John Balde, interview, Basse, 21 October 1965.

friends. His village also grew and spawned others around it. Around the middle of the century, the Mandingo chief of Sandugu died, leaving his brother, still a child, as heir. A royal slave, Modi Fatuma, seized this opportunity to take power, and in the confusion that followed, the Torodo of Sandugu, under Sise and Sali, successfully established their combined territory as an independent enclave.³¹

At the turn of the nineteenth century a Muslim priest, Ndiogou Ba, a Torodo from the Futa Toro, came to the north bank of the river and settled in Baddibu, one of the Mandingo kingdoms there. He established a Koranic school, and in 1809 the first of his sons was born and was named Maba. It was Maba who was to become the leader of an Islamic revivalist movement which would in only a few decades sweep away the centuries-old Mandingo hegemony on both sides of the river.³²

A third Fula group, the Fulbe Futo (M: Futangke), came to the Gambia from the Futa Jalon, settling in large numbers south of the present international border. From there bands of warriors invaded the river districts yearly during the dry season. In 1850 Hyacinte Hecquard found communities of these warrior Fula living around Kolibentang forming outposts in Mandingo territory. To the south of Kolibentang the Fulbe Futo had evolved a system of government similar to the British Indirect Rule. Each village of different ethnic stock had its own indigenous chief together with a resident Fula who represented the almami of Timbo and who held actual power in the village.³³ The Fulbe Futo preyed upon other Fula groups as well as on Mandingo agricultural communities, which joined the pastoral Fula in resisting the annual raids of the Fulbe Futo.³⁴

In addition, there were other Fula groups, less important in numbers or influence, which had drifted into the Mandingo states: the Habobe, Hamanabe, Jombonko, Jawando, Labo (an itinerant woodworking caste, members of which attached themselves to communities of all ethnic backgrounds), and the Rorobe (pure pastoralists from Bondu). These pastoralists, some-

times called *Fulbe Burure* in the Gambia, built insubstantial settlements of cane or straw, surrounded by small gardens and a wide enclosure for cattle. Rarely did they stay in any place for more than five years.

By the nineteenth century some Fula were thoroughly Islamized (the Fulbe Futo, Hamanabe, Torodo, Jawando); others were in the process of conversion (Fulbe Firdu, Habobe); and others were still firmly animist (Rorobe, Jombonko, Labo).³⁵

The Fula dialect groups were further differentiated by occupation. Many were semi-sedentary farmers settled near Mandingo towns along the river, leasing small parcels of land and tending the herds of the landowners as well as their own, gradually becoming assimilated into the settled populations of the Mandingo states. According to European traders they were the most productive cultivators in the Gambia, raising tobacco, cotton, corn, millet, and rice and selling their surplus to the Mandingo. Other Fula, the Rorobe in particular, remaining purely pastoral and nomadic, sought to avoid contact with sedentary peoples and resisted social change.

The Fulbe Futo, who had no dialect ties with the other Fula groups, lived by warfare. The men did little agricultural work or trading themselves. The women cultivated rice outside the walls of Kolibentang under guard, but other foodstuffs, cattle, slaves, or arms were simply taken from neighboring Mandingo—or Fula—as needed. Their raids often made jointly with Torodo mercenaries from Bondu, disrupted trade and agriculture in the upper river districts throughout the middle years of the nineteenth century.³⁶

Thus, the Fula who had migrated to the Gambia Valley by the mid-nineteenth century were divided into a variety of linguistic, occupational, and caste groupings; this diversity seems to have dissipated the political impact of their considerable numbers. There is little evidence of intergroup cooperation, and a pattern of reserve, if not hostility, between them was characteristic, as it had been in Hausaland before the jihad there. As a result, their

31. Rançon, pp. 107–8.

32. See Chapter 5.

33. Hecquard, p. 118 ff, 231.

34. CO/87/55, O'Connor to Newcastle, 6 August 1853; Hecquard, p. 209.

35. D. Bayley, "Notes on the Ethnological Division of the Fulas," 27 September 1939, Archives of the Gambia; Forde, pp. 12–15. For aspects of Fula social organization, see Charlotte A. Quinn, "A Nineteenth Century Fulbe State," *Journal of African History*, XII (1971), 427–40.

36. CO/87/57, O'Connor to Newcastle, 1 February 1854; Hecquard, p. 118.

relationships with other ethnic groups along the river were highly particularized.

- Generally, Fula migrants formally acknowledged the authority of the Mandingo kings and village chiefs over the use of land within the river states. A mutually beneficial relationship existed between them and the Mandingo leaders. Fula were granted protection and use of land for pasturage in return for herding the landowners' cattle, and for gifts, taxes, or other services. The Fula were welcomed by Mandingo village chiefs and kings for they brought wealth and prestige to a district by these favors.³⁷

Though both sides could profit from this association, the relationship frequently became onerous. European travelers often reported that Fula bands were exploited by their Mandingo neighbors. Usually if conditions became intolerable they would move elsewhere, hoping for better terms from a new landlord. However, Moore visited a town in Jimara where Fula, claiming their cattle had been stolen, attacked the nearby Mandingo community, destroying it and selling its inhabitants as slaves. In 1842 when two Fula settlements were burned by Mandingo in Wuli, the state of Bondu sent 200 horsemen and 100 foot soldiers to avenge them.³⁸

Travelers visiting the Gambia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had found the Fula along the river resentful of heavy taxes imposed on them by the Mandingo landlords. However, they generally preferred flight to violence and rarely settled anywhere for more than a few years at a time. Nevertheless, just after the middle of the nineteenth century the Fulbe Firdu of Kabu, led by Molo Egue, a well-known elephant hunter of slave origin, attacked a local Mandingo chief's town after a dispute, it is said, over a stolen sheep. From there the revolt spread throughout the kingdom, already heavily settled by the Fula migrants. The almami of the Futa Jalon at Timbo was called in to help the Fula of Kabu, and together they defeated the Mandingo king at his stockade at Sullabali. The almami returned to the Futa, and Egue maintained his leadership in the movement, though he con-

37. Bertrand Bocandé, "Notes sur la Guinée portugaise ou Sénégal méridionale," *Bulletin de la société de géographie*, series 3, XII (1849), 58 ff.

38. Jobson, p. 45; Moore, p. 143; William Fox, *A Brief History of the Wesleyan Missions on the Western Coast of Africa* (London, 1851), p. 546.

tinued to pay tribute to Timbo for a number of years. Egue changed his name to Alfa Molo and established the capital of Fuladu at Ndorna, south of the Gambia states. Under his chiefship, and that of his son Musa, the Fulbe Firdu played an important part in the religious wars of the south-bank states during the second half of the century.³⁹

The Wolof

In contrast to the Fula, there were relatively few Wolof in the Mandingo states along the Gambia before the second half of the nineteenth century, although 100 years later the Wolof were the third largest population group in the Gambia colony. In the early decades of the century they were thinly dispersed through the north-bank states of Niumi, Baddibu, Salum (Pakala), and Niani. Traditions in Niumi refer to one lineage group of Wolof-speakers which migrated there during the early years of the century. Many of Baddibu's Wolof-speakers had come at the same time due to differences with the king of Salum. It was the Wolof of Baddibu and Salum that dominated the Muslim revivalist movement which swept through the western Senegambia during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁴⁰

In addition to those living in the river states there were a number of Wolof in the British settlement at Bathurst. Many of them had emigrated south from St. Louis and Goree after 1815-16 when the French assumed control of the Senegalese settlements and the British had established themselves at Bathurst. They formed a class of small traders and artisans in the town but

39. Cherno Kadde Bande, "Note on Alfa and Musa Molo," 1938, Archives of the Gambia. Lamin Bande, interview, Sankulikunda, 23 October 1965. Another version of these events was offered by the Serahuli community at Kobakunda in the (precolonial) district of Fuladu. According to them it was the Serahuli who rebelled against the Mandingo and called in the almami of Timbo to assist them. After defeating the Mandingo king they emigrated to Bondu and the almami returned to the Futa. It was then that Alfa Molo stepped in to fill the political vacuum which had been left (Jawaru Kurubali, interview, Kobakunda, 21 October 1965).

40. There were 40,805 Wolof in the Gambia in 1963—11,311 of them living in Bathurst (Colonial Office, *Gambia 1962 and 1963*, p. 120). During the religious wars after 1860, many Wolof with their families poured into Niumi from Salum—2,000 in March, 1863, alone (G. Lorimer, "Report on the History and Previous Native Administration of Niumi," 1942, Archives of the Gambia; CO/87/76, d'Arcy to Newcastle, 24 March 1863).

though they came from the same linguistic group as the Wolof of the interior, their ties were closer to the Europeans than to the African communities on the river.

The Wolof speak one of the languages of the West Atlantic group of the Niger-Congo family, and language is one of the few aspects of their culture by which they can be distinguished from their neighbors. By the middle of the nineteenth century they had long been intermarrying with other groups, in the area between the Salum and Gambia rivers, particularly Serer, Mandingo, and the Fula Torodo, and there were many institutional similarities between them and these peoples. The hierarchical social structure of all four societies was similar. At the apex were families with access to the kingship and leadership at the local level, then came freemen, artisans, and slaves in descending order. In addition, the Wolof, like the Mandingo, formed into age-groups.⁴¹

The Wolof families who moved into the Mandingo states along the Gambia by the nineteenth century had settled generally in small, compact communities made up of a single patrilineal group with a few artisan families and slaves installed at their outskirts or in dependent hamlets nearby. As the village grew in size it was divided into wards (*wasu*, similar to the Mandingo *kabilo*). These tended to hive off, forming separate communities, often at a considerable distance from the parent settlement because of bitter rivalries over succession to leadership or because of the need for more land. The office of chief of the village was vested in patrilineal descendants of founder-settler families. Matrilineages were also important, however, in the social organization. While the patrilineage was the grouping for the inheritance of political status and property within Islamic communities, the matrilineage was the focus of aid and education of small children.⁴²

There were scattered reports of friction between the Mandingo and Wolof communities along the north bank of the Gambia. The Mandingo kingdoms had long been under pressure from the large Wolof-Serer state of Salum which bordered the north-bank states of Niumi, Baddibu, and Niani. Salum maintained a corridor of

41. For Wolof ethnography see, among others, David P. Gamble, *The Wolof of Senegambia* (London, 1957); Forde, p. 11 ff; David Ames, "Wolof Co-operative Work Groups," in *Continuity and Change in African Cultures*, ed. William Bascom and Melville J. Herskovits (Chicago, 1959), pp. 224-37.

42. Gamble, *The Wolof*, p. 49 ff; Ames, p. 226 ff.

land (the Pakala district) as far as the river. Its principal Gambian port, Kau-ur, was divided into widely separated quarters inhabited by Mandingo and Wolof, and fighting was reported between the two groups there during the nineteenth century. With the continuing threat of external interference from the north, Mandingo in the river states during the religious wars of the nineteenth century were to show considerable suspicion and hostility toward their Wolof neighbors.⁴³

The Jola

A fourth linguistic group which had importance historically in the river states was the Jola. Related, according to their own tradition, to the Serer, speaking one of the West Atlantic group of languages, the Jola probably represented some of the earliest inhabitants of the Gambia Valley still to be found there in the nineteenth century. They had moved to the coast before the fifteenth century when the Portuguese found them established at the river's mouth. The Mandingo who had driven them westward followed them to the river's mouth, and by the eighteenth century the Jola were in retreat to the south, away from the river. By the nineteenth century they were settled between the Gambia and the Cacheo rivers and were of peripheral importance to the politics of the Gambia River Valley in their settlements in the forests and swamps of the southern districts of Combo, Fogny, and Kiang.⁴⁴

43. Moore, p. 151; William Moister, *Memorials of Missionary Labours in Western Africa, the West Indies and the Cape of Good Hope* (London, 1866), p. 175. It is a moot point whether Salum actually represented a frontier of Wolof expansion. Politically, it was associated with the cluster of Wolof kingdoms to the north and recognized the formal leadership of the ruler of Jolof. The ruling family of Salum was said to be closely tied by marriage to the royal lineage of Cayor, one of the Wolof states to the north. Nevertheless, the population of Salum was largely Serer. They spoke one of the West Atlantic languages, and traced descent matrilineally. They intermarried heavily with the Wolof who began moving down from the north and into the Salum region after the sixteenth century. The Wolof living in Salum during the nineteenth century were concentrated largely in the eastern districts nearest the Gambia (see MMC, Sénégal I, Faïdherbe to MC, 17 July 1860; Gamble, *The Wolof*, pp. 46, 97 ff; Martin A. Klein, *Islam and Imperialism in Senegal* [Stanford, 1968], p. 5 ff).

44. Moore, p. 24; L. J. B. Bérenger-Féraud, *Les peuplades de la Sénégambie* (Paris, 1879), p. 289. After the establishment of the British Protectorate in the 1890s, the Jola began to move back into the south-bank districts. In 1963 they numbered 22,046, almost all in Combo (Colonial Office, *Gambia 1962 and 1963*, p. 120).

The Jola had participated exhaustively in the slave trade, both as victims and aggressors, and in the nineteenth century a trickle of slaves was still being smuggled out of Vintang Creek in Fogny. These slaves, together with the sale of rice, palm wine, and beeswax to European and Mandingo traders, formed the basis of the area's economy.⁴⁵

Although the Jola evidently were once organized into larger territorial groupings under the political-religious authority of chiefs, by the 1800s they had suffered so many years of raiding by the Mandingo and so much warfare among themselves that their society in Fogny and other Gambian districts was virtually anarchic.⁴⁶ Their communities were divided into nuclear family groups settled in hamlets which were scattered over several square miles. Although the senior man of the founding lineage was the formal head of the community, he had no power other than as arbiter and ritual leader. Each hamlet was virtually autonomous and continually fragmenting. Marriage ties were easily broken as the husband paid no bridewealth. Male children remained with the father, girls with the mother, who returned to her family. As sons came of age, they left to found their own households elsewhere. However, if a man was murdered his eldest son inherited his sandals and the obligation to continue the feud until his father's death was avenged.⁴⁷

When the Jola were attacked or planned a raid themselves, hamlets within a district sharing ties of patrilineal kinship, or traditions of common settlement, would unite under a proven warrior who was given full authority. This commission ended as soon as the occasion had passed, but, although brief, these alliances proved effective. In some areas where Mandingo pressure was continuous these alliances assumed a permanent form in walled and heavily fortified villages, ruled by a council of the heads of the component families under the nominal leadership of the head of the founding family.⁴⁸

Unlike most of the rest of the population of the Senegambia,

45. Béranger-Féraud, p. 291; Mitchinson, p. 411; Park, p. 4.

46. L. V. Thomas, *Les Diola* (Dakar, 1959), p. 201 ff; Moore, p. 35; Béranger-Féraud, p. 289.

47. P. -D. Boilat, *Esquisses Sénégalaises* (Paris, 1853), pp. 120-21; Park, p. 9; Thomas, p. 202.

48. Hecquard, p. 113; Thomas, p. 201.

the Jola were highly resistant to change or the influence of other ethnic groups. Centuries of Mandingo raiding had built up an intense antagonism between the two groups, and the Jola were the only sizable population in the Gambia virtually untouched by Islam. Some are still animist today.⁴⁹

The Serahuli

In addition to Mandingo, Fula, Wolof, and Jola communities established along the Gambia in the nineteenth century, there were several other ethnic groups represented, but the numbers of persons of each group were seldom greater than a few hundred or so. Although they were not permanent residents for the most part, Serahuli were found scattered through the river states, speaking another of the Mande languages. They had long been associated with the Mandingo as long-distance traders from the Senegal and Upper Niger regions. Coming 500 miles or more from Bambuk, the Senegal Valley, and Bondu in groups ranging from twenty up to two hundred or more, they would hire land from the Mandingo chiefs and grow groundnuts for two or three years, just long enough to be able to buy the goods they wanted from the European traders before returning home. By the middle of the nineteenth century Serahuli and other similarly organized groups from the east (such as the Bambara), mobile and without local ties, had proved themselves useful to the kings of the river states as mercenaries and were paid out of the profits from the raids which they undertook. In Niumi, for example, Demba Sonko, king of Niumi during the 1840s and 1850s, hired a band of 700 Serahuli to maintain order within the kingdom and exact customs from its rebellious eastern districts.⁵⁰

Although many different populations had settled along the Gambia, attracted by its economic advantages, the Mandingo aristocracy had managed to maintain monopoly ownership of the best land along the river, except, for example, within the narrow area where Salum reached the river bank and in the tiny Torodo enclave in Niani. Despite the number of Fula in the Gambia

49. Moore, p. 36; Hubert Deschamps, *Le Sénégal et la Gambie* (Paris, 1964), p. 38.

50. CO/87/52, MacDonnell to Pakington, 12 July 1852; Gamble, *Socio-Economic Survey*, pp. 73-74; CO/87/57, O'Connor to Grey, 28 August 1854.

states and the dissatisfactions arising from their dependence on local Mandingo lineage leaders, even with powerful Fula states nearby, they were too divided by origin, experience, occupation, and caste to challenge Mandingo supremacy. The Wolof were too few within the river states. Nor could the Jola, fragmented and in retreat, offer any serious local alternative to Mandingo rule. In fact, relationships between these alien ethnic groups and the Mandingo lineage heads—like those within the Mandingo population itself—tended to reinforce the power of the Mandingo founder-settler lineages. “Strangers” of any ethnic background paid taxes and provided services to a Mandingo aristocracy which controlled the best of the lands in the Gambia Valley.

2

The Mandingo Kingdoms and Their Rulers

Families with a long history of rule along the Gambia were threatened by the middle of the nineteenth century with a sweeping rearrangement of the traditional social order within their kingdoms, despite a semblance of stability which persisted in some of them and despite the growth of the groundnut trade which seemed to ensure widespread prosperity to all groups. Until the end of the century the Senegambia was swept by secular and religious warfare, large populations were displaced, many members of the ruling clans were killed off or driven into exile, and states were divided and reconstituted under European colonial rule.

In the early nineteenth century when large-scale European intervention in the Gambia was still far in the future, the Mandingo ruled over most of the river valley below Barrakunda Falls, though in some areas their control was tenuous. Fifteen kingdoms (including Salum, ruled by Wolof-Serer), some more clearly defined and centralized than others, divided the river's banks.¹ All had changed in size and shape over the centuries, for populations in frontier areas on the Senegambian Plateau were unstable in their allegiances.

The North-Bank States

In the early nineteenth century Niumi extended nearly 40 miles along the north bank at the river's mouth and claimed territory

1. From West to East they were (north bank) Niumi, Baddibu, Salum, Lower Niani, Upper Niani, Wuli; (south bank) Combo, Fogny, Kiang, Jarra, Niamina, Eropina, Jimara, Tomani, Kantora.

as far as Sokone, now a town in Senegal.² For the Gambia, Niumi was thickly settled, its population gathered into over 40 towns and villages, some with more than 2,000 inhabitants. The majority of the people were Mandingo, many of them Muslim. There were also Wolof settled in Niumi and Serer who had been driven by the Mandingo to the fringes of the state. Fula pastoralists herded their cattle, and Serahuli came periodically to the area to grow groundnuts.³

Niumi's importance along the Gambia did not depend on its size, its influence on other states along the river, its army, or the spread of ideas from within its territory. It was a trading state, situated at the intersection of land and water routes. A flourishing commerce in salt had been followed by heavy involvement in the slave trade, and by the 1850s Niumi was one of the export centers for the groundnut trade. The British colony of Bathurst was adjacent to Niumi's riverfront, and Albreda, the principal French post in the Gambia, was established on mainland Niumi itself. Niumi's eastern neighbor, Baddibu, was one of the richest groundnut producing areas on the river but lacked river outlets for the export of its crop. Niumi, on the other hand, had one of the few stretches of river frontage on the Gambia not choked by mangrove swamps.

Baddibu was also populated by Mandingo,⁴ who were reported to be generally animist.⁵ It was one of the most productive regions along the river for groundnut farming but because of mangrove swamps along its river bank, was largely dependent on Niumi for outlet ports. At times Jokadu, Niumi's eastern district, was tributary to Baddibu, and in the 1840s Baddibu supported the leaders of a rebellion there against the Mansa Niumi (king of Niumi).⁶

2. Generally in the European sources Niumi is referred to as Barra (see Martin A. Klein, *Islam and Imperialism in Senegal* [Stanford, 1968], p. 29).

3. R. W. Macklin, "Queens and Kings of Niumi," *Man*, XXXV, no. 35 (1935), 67; CO/87/100, Brown to Administrator, 27 September 1871; Hyacinte Hecquard, *Voyage sur la côte et dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique occidentale* (Paris, 1855), p. 170 ff. Although Niumi was thickly settled, Golberry's estimate of a population of 200,000 seems unlikely (Sylvain Golberry, *Fragments d'un voyage en Afrique*, 2 vols. [Paris, 1802], II, 158).

4. French sources generally refer to Baddibu as Rip.

5. Hecquard, p. 170.

6. CO/87/55, OC'onnor to Newcastle, 8 July 1853.

Beyond Baddibu on the north bank was the southern extension of Salum, the province of Pakala.⁷ Its chief town, Kau-ur, had been one of the principal slave ports on the Gambia and, according to Moore's report, "the greatest Resort of People, and the most Trade of any Town in the whole River."⁸ During the nineteenth century its importance diminished with the decline of the slave trade although, because of its ties with the cluster of Wolof states to the north and its location on the Gambia, Kau-ur continued to be a center for the contraband trade in slaves to the French posts on the Salum River, as well as the French trade in groundnuts and hides which continued along the upper Gambia throughout the century.⁹

The population of Pakala contained one of the few concentrations of Wolof along the river, and Kau-ur was divided into wards, virtually separate villages, inhabited by Mandingo or Wolof. During the eighteenth century Pakala seems to have achieved a measure of independence although it, like Niumi and Baddibu, was tributary to the Bur Salum (king of Salum). However, by the nineteenth century, Pakala had been virtually absorbed by Salum and the chiefs of the river district were installed by the bur. As in the Mandingo states along the river, the office of chief rotated between the founder lineages of four towns.¹⁰

To the east of the Pakala district of Salum, separated from it by a narrow creek, lay Niani, once the most powerful state on the river.¹¹ Much of its revenue had come from taxes on caravans and from the export of slaves through its river town of Niani Maru during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. By the nineteenth century, however, Niani was disintegrating into small chiefdoms fighting for power among themselves. The kingdom had long been divided into two large districts, virtually independent of one another, which were referred to on maps dating from the eighteenth

7. Salum, and Pakala, its Gambian province, was also referred to on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century maps as Barsally.

8. Francis Moore, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa* (London, 1738), p. 21.

9. See Klein, pp. 169-70.

10. David P. Gamble, *The Wolof of Senegambia* (London, 1957), pp. 20-21.

11. Mungo Park, *Travels of Mungo Park*, ed. Ronald Miller (1795; London, 1954), p. lxiii.

century as Upper Niani and Lower Niani. By the nineteenth century the king of Upper Niani was devastating Lower Niani, despite intervention by the small British Gambian colony on behalf of Kataba, the old ruling town in Lower Niani. Kataba was further weakened by the independence of Nianibantang, a nearby district town, and by the power of the state's growing Muslim minority. Both Upper Niani and Lower Niani had been heavily infiltrated by Fula pastoralists and Torodo, and its Muslim population was probably the largest along the river. Overshadowing these internal divisions, Wuli, Niani's neighbor to the east and another of the Gambian Mandingo kingdoms, continually threatened to overrun the divided state as it had done early in the century.¹²

Like Niani, Wuli had once been more important to the politics and economy of the entire river valley. Geographically favorable to settlement and agriculture and with the heaviest rainfall among the interior states, it had attracted a highly diversified population of Mandingo, Fula, Wolof, and Serahuli. Its ports, Fatatenda and Yarbutenda, lay at the junction of the navigable section of the river and the caravan routes from Bakel, Bondu, Segou, and Tenda to the north and east. The Mansa Wuli controlled communications between the Sudan interior and the sea during the eighteenth century and before.

The governor of the small British colony at Bathurst considered Wuli with its large cavalry to be one of the strongest states in the Gambia in the mid-nineteenth century. Nevertheless, by then there were many signs of decay. A wilderness of two days crossing had encroached on the eastern frontier between Wuli and the prosperous Fula kingdom of Bondu. Trade from the east had lessened, and the ports were reduced to a few huts on the riverbank. The state had become a buffer between the powerful Fula theocracies of the Senegal (Bondu, Futa Toro) and the Gambia Valley. Wuli suffered annual invasions by the Fula and in the 1820s was considered a province of Bondu. Nevertheless, the Man-

12. Captain Washington, "Some Account of Mohanmedu-Sisei, a Mandingo of Nyani-Marú on the Gambia," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, VIII (1838), 449; William Fox, *A Brief History of the Wesleyan Missions on the Western Coast of Africa* (London, 1851), p. 278; Hecquard, p. 170.

dingo rulers of Wuli were able to defeat the Fula raiders from the Futa Jalon and Bondu in 1855 and were one of the few ruling lineages along the Gambia to hold power continuously through the nineteenth-century wars of religion.¹³

The states of the north bank on the fringes of the savanna were thus in close contact with Wolof and Fula kingdoms of the Senegambian Plateau. By the 1850s immigrants from the north had brought a militant form of religious and political reform to these states and were exerting considerable pressure on the Mandingo ruling classes. However, while the north-bank kings and chiefs maintained the form and, to some extent, the substance of their traditional position, those on the south bank, were during the nineteenth century in a substantially weaker position.

The South-Bank States

Kantora, Tomani, and Jimara, across the river from Wuli, had once been part of the large Mandingo kingdom of Kabu which had been created between the Gambia and Casamance rivers by Mande-speaking peoples from the Upper Niger. Many of the ruling families and much of the Mandingo population of the Gambia states had come from Kabu, and members of the Mane and Sane lineages were still to be found in that area in the twentieth century. Kabu had once been the center of trade from the interior to the south bank of the river, as Wuli had been for the north.

In the early years of the nineteenth century Kantora suffered the full force of Fulbe Futo migrations pushing north from the Futa Jalon, along the same routes the Mandingo had used some 400 years before. When Hecquard visited Kantora in the 1850s most of the population—Mandingo, Fula, and Serahuli—paid tribute to Mamadi Yacoub, the representative of the almami of Timbo, ruler of the Futa Jalon. Mamadi had built a heavily fortified town at Serrugia, but by 1850 his power had been largely usurped by a company of Fula mercenaries from Bondu. Although

13. CO/87/57, O'Connor to Newcastle, 1 February 1854; Park, p. 30; Anne Raffanel, *Voyage dans l'Afrique occidentale, 1843-44* (Paris, 1846), p. 483; CO/87/50, MacDonnell to Grey, 1 May 1851; CO/87/60, O'Connor to Grey, 21 November 1855.

they were nominally under his authority, in fact they usually kept most of the booty gathered during jointly conducted raids along the south bank as far as Eropina.¹⁴

The four small kingdoms west of Kantora—Tomani, Jimara, Eropina, and Niamina—had also suffered from the Fula advance, and by 1850 were reduced to a chain of fortified towns along the river's edge, maintaining a tenuous authority over territory surrounding them. In Tomani these small towns formed a confederation, each segment headed by its own alkali. As in other Mandingo states, there was a king with the title of *mansa* living at one of the towns. But he seems to have had no more than powers of arbitration in his council of provincial chiefs. He could not interfere in the internal affairs of the heavily fortified member communities. Hecquard found that when they were attacked, the federated towns chose a proven warrior from among their populations with absolute, if temporary, authority over all.¹⁵

During the early part of the nineteenth century Eropina and Niamina were even less unified than Tomani, for member-towns were quarreling among themselves; except as a field fought over first by one side, then the other, they played little part that is recorded in the wars of the second half of the century.

Jarra on the other hand, lying to the southwest of Niamina, around a bend in the river, was in Moore's day "famous for laborious People, by which Means it abounds with Corn and Rice." By the middle of the nineteenth century the kingdom was profiting from an intensive trade in groundnuts. As many as 75,000 bushels were exported in a season together with large amounts of beeswax from its southern districts.¹⁶ Jarra's kingship was correspondingly more important than those of the small states to the east.

Of all the south-bank states, however, only Kiang and Combo were to play an important part in the struggle to maintain the

14. Hecquard, p. 190; Bertrand Bocandé, "Notes sur la Guinée portugaise ou Sénégambie méridionale," *Bulletin de la société de géographie*, Series 3, XII, (1849), 66; André Rançon, *Dans la Haute-Gambie: voyage d'exploration scientifique*, 1891-1892 (Paris, 1894), p. 145.

15. Hecquard, pp. 187-88; Bocandé, p. 66.

16. Moore, p. 25; T. E. Poole, *Life, Scenery and Customs in Sierra Leone and the Gambia*, 2 vols. (London, 1850), II, 109; Hecquard, p. 155.

traditional forms of Mandingo supremacy along the Gambia during the nineteenth century. When Portuguese came to the Gambia in the sixteenth century they found the land on the south bank near the river's mouth occupied by the Jola. Three Mandingo states were carved out of this area: Kiang, Fogny, and Combo. Never an area of heavy Mandingo settlement, Fogny did not recover from the loss of its Jola population during the era of the slave trade, nor from the losses of revenue which followed the abolition of slaving. Its territory along the river was delimited by the banks of Vintang Creek, one of the major tributaries of the lower Gambia.

Kiang and Combo, like Jarra, profited from the export of produce in the nineteenth century; groundnuts and palm products brought a measure of prosperity to both kingdoms. The British established a small settlement in 1816 on an island separated from Combo only by a narrow creek. Eventually they paid customs to the *mansa* for it and for an adjacent strip of mainland known as "British Combo." In addition, the *mansa* did a brisk business in leasing plots of land privately to British subjects.¹⁷

Relations with Manding and Salum

When Europeans first visited the river kingdoms in the fifteenth century they reported that the ruler of Mali was still the overlord of the Gambian Mandingo communities. The king of the Manding state, at the height of its power in the fourteenth century, maintained loose political ties with the far-flung districts of an empire which extended from the Senegambia in the west to Dendi in the east. Even at its height, the relationship between the administrative center and the outlying areas such as the Gambia seem to have been tenuous. Despite the continuing traffic of traders between the Gambia and the Niger commercial towns, the political link with the Sudan faded as Mali's power declined. The Dyula were traders, not agents of the declining imperial administration. Buckor Sano, a Mande trader who yearly led caravans to the Gambia, told Richard Jobson, the British merchant and explorer: "I am as you are, a Julietto, which signifies a Merchant, . . . I seeke

17. CO/87/57, O'Connor to Newcastle, 21 June 1854.

abroad as you doe." Jobson quotes him as saying disdainfully, "neither do I, as the Kings of our Country do which is to eate, and drinke, and lye still at home amongst their women."¹⁸ By the time Park traveled from the Gambia states to Manding at the end of the eighteenth century, he found a wilderness above Barrakunda Falls which took five days to cross.

During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the independence of the Gambian kingdoms was more immediately threatened by the expansive power of the Bur Salum. When the Portuguese first came to the Senegambia they were told that the Wolof ruled the whole country between the Gambia and Senegal rivers.¹⁹ Moore reported that the towns of the north bank of the Gambia paid tribute to Salum, a state lying along the frontiers of Niumi, Baddibu, and Niani. Every year they sent grasses and grain to the Bur Salum at Kahone. The tales of their emancipation from Salum are important in the oral traditions of north-bank communities even today.²⁰ For many years it was feared that if he could find the means to transport his horses across the river, the Bur Salum would overrun the south bank as well,²¹ and the threat of interference from the north hung over the rest of the river states throughout the nineteenth century.

In the seventeenth century Jobson had reported that the kings at the mouth of the river were able to demand higher taxes than those farther up the Gambia, where customs were given mainly as a courtesy.²² A French observer in 1806 believed that the most powerful states on the Gambia were Niumi and Fogny. More recently it has been argued that Wuli, Kantora, and Salum dominated the river.²³ Certainly the establishment of the French at Albreda and the British at Bathurst near the mouth of the river and the development of the groundnut trade favored Niumi, Baddibu, and Salum, while changes in the pattern of commerce from the interior tended to isolate Kantora and its neighbors. However,

18. Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade* (1623; London, 1932), pp. 124–25.

19. W. T. Hamlyn, *A Short History of the Gambia* (Bathurst, 1931), p. 16.

20. N'Famara Singhatey, interview, Saba, 27 October 1965; Sherif Jammeh, interview, Illiassa, 26 October 1965.

21. Jobson, p. 65.

22. Jobson, p. 64.

23. Florence Mahoney, "Government and Opinion in the Gambia, 1816–1901," Ph.D. dissertation (University of London, 1963), p. 4.

in assessing the influence or importance of individual states on the eve of the jihad a number of criteria are involved. One of these is the balance of power in each Mandingo kingdom between the paramount political office and the other institutions and special-interest groups within the state.

The Ruling Lineages

The structure of the Mandingo kingship—the rules governing recruitment, authority, and tenure of office—had been long established on the river. Both Jobson and Moore, who had considerable experience in the Gambia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries respectively, described the kingships in the river states in some detail. Their observations concerning a number of the river states indicate a remarkable continuity with those of French and British commentators in the nineteenth century and with traditions as they are remembered today.

In the early nineteenth century the political organization of kingdoms on both banks of the river was still firmly grounded in the structure of Mandingo society. With some exceptions, families with traditions of direct descent from founder-settler ancestors claimed paramount rights to land ownership throughout the state and the economic, social, and political assets associated with it.

In every kingdom he visited in the Gambia, Moore found "Lords of the Soil," village leaders with much wider territorial rights and responsibilities than the heads of other settlements.²⁴ These were the heads of lineages long-settled in the states, lineages whose growing membership and associated "stranger" groups had spread to villages through the surrounding bush until the lineage leader had an entire district under his authority. The title of these senior lineage leaders was *suma*. They had power to allocate land within their districts and received a variety of taxes for land use.

In a number of the Gambian states these long-established lineages shared rights to the kingship on a rotating basis. For example, Baddibu was ruled by four lineage groups: the Jadama who lived at Jumansar; the Jame at Illiassa; the Marong at Jare-jare and the Marong at India; and the Mambure at Kubanda. In Jarra the kingship was shared by the Danso and Sonko-Mussa

24. Moore, p. 37.

clans ruling from Jappení and Badume respectively. Niumi was ruled by three lineages living in seven royal towns, and Kiang and Combo followed similar patterns. Royal traditions in these states say that the pattern of rotation was fixed, but there is often disagreement as to what the exact order was. In Wuli, unlike the rest, the title *mansa* was held by the head of one lineage, living in one capital town.²⁵

An elaborate series of traditions of origin preserved by the ruling lineages in each state supported their claims to the kingship. In Niumi, for example, the royal traditions claimed that the first Mandingo to reach the area were the Jame, a branch of the ruling clan of Baddibu to the east. The Jame are said to have come originally to the Gambia from Manding, the center of the Mali Empire. In Niumi and in Baddibu there are traditions which say that women ruled at first but were overthrown by men who established the kingship on a rotating basis among their lineages.²⁶ The Jame fixed their capital at Bakendik, and from there segments of their lineage moved out to found other settlements (notably Sitanunku). They were forced to pay tribute to the kings of Salum to the north, who claimed the land as far as the riverbanks. It is said that the Jame were followed by a second Mandingo lineage, the Mane, which came from Kabu and crossed the river to help the Jame throw off Salum's rule. They were not successful, for the people of Niumi continued to pay tribute to Salum, but the Mane stayed on, settling at Kanuma and later at Bunyadu.

Later still a lineage called Sonko, which now claims to have Fula as well as Mandingo origins, migrated from the east and settled near the border of Salum in a town called Bankiri. In Mandingo, *bankiri* means "by force," and the Sonko were known as great fighters.²⁷ They were employed at first as agents for the Bur Salum, whose residence was at Kahone, and collected tribute, a tax on all agricultural products, from the Serer and Wolof communities around them. Eventually they fell out with the Wolof rulers and

25. Sherif Jammeh, interview, Illiasa, 26 October 1965; Bocandé, p. 63; Hecquard, p. 148; Landing Omar Sonko, interview, Sika, 28 October 1965; CO/87/61, Brown to Molesworth, 10 September 1855; Jere Sanyang, interview, Kwinella, 19 October 1965.

26. Sherif Jammeh, interview, Illiasa, 26 October 1965; Macklin, p. 67.

27. See G. Lorimer, "Report on the History and Previous Native Administration of Niumi," 1942, Archives of the Gambia.

moved south to the banks of the Gambia, where the Mane and the Jame still sought a means to throw off Wolof rule. The Sonkos were promised a share in the land and the kingship in Niumi if they could end the tribute payments. When they succeeded in doing so, however, the earlier settlers are said to have tried to go back on their bargain, and a battle followed at which the Jame and Mane were defeated. The Sonko lineage settled at Berending, later at Essau and Jiffet as well. The peace made between the three families at that time is said to have lasted ever since.²⁸

It is difficult to check these legends or assign dates to them. The Sonko of Sika say that they were settled there before the British came to James Island in the seventeenth century, yet Niumi still paid tribute to Salum in the early eighteenth century.²⁹ Nevertheless, rights to the kingship of Niumi during the nineteenth century were reflected in these traditions of the tripartite origins of the state. Succession followed an elaborate system of rotation among seven towns settled by the three royal lineages: Bakendik (Jame), Kanuma (Mane), Sitanunku (Jame), Essau Jelenkunda (Sonko), Bunyadu (Mane), Essau Mansaring Su (Sonko), and Berending (Sonko). The exact order among them is different in each version collected, and it is evident from the difficulties involved in collating the king-lists preserved by each of the royal clans that these traditions represent a constitutional ideal. Nevertheless, they were a reality in people's minds in the twentieth century when the British were told that they had "put the succession wrong" by appointing only members of the Sonko lineage to chiefships in the Niumi protectorate.³⁰

These family traditions also traced lineage ties across state borders. Members of the Mane clan ruled in Jarra, Tomani, Jimara, and Niumi. Sonko shared rights to the kingship in Niumi and Jarra; the Jame, in Niumi and Baddibu; and the Jadama, in Baddibu and Niamina. The ruling lineages of the river states seem to have based alliances on such relationships. For example, a mansa of Tomani crossed the river at the beginning of the

28. *Ibid.*; Macklin, pp. 67–68; Landing Omar Sonko, interview, Sika, 28 October, 1965.

29. Moore, p. 19.

30. G. Lorimer, "Report on the History and Previous Native Administration of Niumi," 1942, Archives of the Gambia; Macklin, p. 67.

eighteenth century to help the Mansa Wuli put down a revolt. The mansas of Combo and Fogny supported one another in resisting the growing power of the Muslims in the nineteenth century. The Mansa Jarra, temporarily driven from his state by the Fula in 1848, took refuge in Niamina, and the rulers of Baddibu and Niumi on one occasion exchanged sons. The Mansa Niumi claimed that his family once ruled in Combo, directly across the river from his state, and in the mid-thirteenth century the mother of the Mansa Niumi lived in Combo. With Jarra, another south-bank kingdom, the people of Niumi had a "joking relationship."³¹

Powers of the Kingship

As head of one of the state's oldest lineages, the mansa held a position senior to all others. His position gave him certain proprietary rights over all the land in the state. In return for the use of land he was entitled to tribute of goods and services, although this privilege was shared with the local leadership. Travelers or traders had to pay customs to the mansa based on the worth of their goods before they were allowed to pass through the state, and all their property came to the mansa if they died there. Mansa Wuli, for example, compelled merchants with caravans from the interior to take a certain number of his "country cloths" (which served as a currency along the Gambia) for any merchandise he desired. In the eighteenth century the rulers of Niumi collected taxes on wood and water used by traders as well as a percentage on all merchandise brought into the country. Furthermore, they taxed each boat and ship that entered the river (at the rate reported in 1795 to be £20 per vessel). Every foreigner was required to pay a head tax, and both British and French companies paid annual tribute for the use of land at James Island and Albreda.³²

With their councils, the rulers of the Mandingo states served as courts of appeal within their states. Part of whatever fines were collected or proceeds from persons sold into slavery on such occasions went to the mansa. In Jarra if a man convicted of murder

31. For examples of cooperation between the states, see Fox, p. 364; CO/87/55, O'Connor to Newcastle, 3 September 1853; CO/87/71, d'Arcy to Newcastle, 26 February 1861; Gamble, *The Wolof*, p. 54; Hecquard, p. 153; Sherif Jammeh, interview, Illiassa, 26 October 1965; Moore, p. 138.

32. Hecquard, pp. 148-49; Moore, pp. 20-21; Park, p. 3; Jean Baptiste Labat, *Nouvelle relation de l'Afrique occidentale*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1728), IV, 350.

in this court were rich, he would pay an indemnity to the injured family and give a slave to the mansa. If he were poor, he himself became the property of the victim's family, who then gave the mansa three head of cattle.³³

Further revenue was collected for the mansa by the alkali of each town as taxes on the land. Mandingo and Wolof paid a tithe on the harvest and a proportion of their cattle; the Fula gave poultry and cattle products and the skins of all cows they killed. When war threatened, the alkali of each community collected special taxes and sent them to the mansa who was responsible for buying war matériel such as guns, ammunition, and horses for the entire state.³⁴

Thus, the rulers of the principal trading states, particularly at the height of the slave trade and during the eighteenth century, accumulated considerable wealth. Their badge of office was a Mandingo bonnet, a peaked cap ringed with coral and embellished with two bull's horns.³⁵ French traders in the eighteenth century reported that the mansas of Niumi lived in European-style houses and dressed in elaborate costumes. Jean Baptiste Labat, a Frenchman who collected the accounts of travelers visiting the Gambia in the early part of the eighteenth century, described the mansa's household in Niumi. The mansa's daughter, who was said to read and write French, Portuguese, and English, had established herself as the chief intermediary between the traders and her father. At one time married to a Portuguese, she lived in a large square European house and held soirées for the commercial community in a style that boasted fine table linen and other imported luxuries.³⁶

Much of a mansa's wealth was invested in cattle which were the property of the office, not of the man, and were inherited by

33. G. Lorimer, "Report on the History and Previous Native Administration of Niumi," 1942, Archives of the Gambia; Hecquard, p. 148.

34. Sherif Jammeh, interview, Illiassa, 26 October 1965; Jere Sanyang, interview, Kwinella, 19 October 1965; Hecquard, pp. 148-49.

35. A cap worn also by boys during a period of license following circumcision (Labat, p. 287).

36. Labat, p. 350 ff. Labat estimated the mansa's fixed income at "4,000 ecus," gathered from head tax on foreigners living in the kingdom (50 ecus for a Portuguese or mulatto), customs charged the European companies and on vessels in the river, and from noncompany traders (interlopers), who each paid 100 iron bars.

the next incumbent, not by the mansa's family. The rest of his wealth was invested in clients, mercenaries, and slaves who served directly under his authority. These agents (*batu-fa*) acted as the mansa's advisers and spies. They could be sent to settle disputes, carry messages, and organize social functions. The mansa's head slave in Niumi, for example, was charged with collecting taxes for him from certain European traders.³⁷

In 1850 the Mansa Jarra had a private army composed of clients and slaves whom he fed and clothed. When a mansa took office in Jarra during this period he was expected to kill part of the royal herd and distribute the meat, with other of his goods, to secure the support of these followers who were called "the king's men." They were feared by the rest of the population and by passing travelers for their demands, and Hecquard called them: "véritables janissaires . . ." whose depredations the king dared not restrain although they were the scandal of the countryside.³⁸

Similarly, Demba Sonko, Mansa Niumi during the 1840s, hired a small private army of Serahuli mercenaries to maintain order within the kingdom. The Serahuli leader, Ansumana Jaju, married the mansa's daughter, and he and his men were assigned land to cultivate. They remained in Niumi for over twelve years.

The Mandingo rulers fortified their capital towns and traditionally denied all other communities the authority to build a stockade or other fortification. In the seventeenth century Jobson described the two types of Mandingo towns: those surrounded by reed enclosures to keep out animals, and those, particularly the mansa's, enclosed in a high mud-brick wall. In 1850 the Mansa Jarra was still powerful enough to forbid the suma of Jappen, who was next in succession to the kingship and was the ruling king's chief minister, the privilege of fortifying his town.³⁹

To European traders and administrators along the Gambia during the eighteenth century in poorly defended factories and settlements, the rulers of the river states were formidable figures

37. Sherif Jammeh, interview, Illiasa, 26 October 1965; J. M. Gray, *A History of the Gambia* (1940; New York, 1966), p. 14; CO/87/74, d'Arcy to Newcastle, 8 August 1862.

38. Hecquard, p. 148.

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 150, 152; Jobson, p. 59.

—the rulers of Niumi, Fogny, and Pakala (Salum) in particular. The Niumi mansas, breathlessly described by one observer as "the most powerful and terrible of all the kings of the Gambia,"⁴⁰ on several occasions evicted the French and British traders from their stations. Ships passing Niumi's riverfront had to fire a three-gun salute or trade elsewhere along the coast. As late as 1857 the governor of the British colony at the mouth of the river believed (mistakenly) that the Mansa Niumi owned the waters of the Gambia.⁴¹

Succession

Within the royal lineage of the town next in succession the kingship customarily passed collaterally and then to the eldest brother's eldest son. Wuli was an exception. During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the kingship passed from father to eldest son. The heir's title was *farbanna*; he had greater influence than mansas' sons in other Mandingo states, and he lived in a separate fortified compound within the capital town.⁴²

According to twentieth-century informants, the lineage in direct line of succession to the kingship in the Mandingo states was called the *suma-kunda* lineage. Ranking below it was a group composed of sisters' sons and all others of the royal lineage outside the direct line of succession.⁴³ The new mansa was chosen by members of this group in the town next in succession, in consultation with the alkalis of the villages in its district and with the public assent of the rest of the population. This popular assent seems to have been expressed after the choice had been made by the royal lineage and local leaders. Once chosen, tradition holds that the

40. J.-B. Léonard Durand, *Voyage au Sénégal* (Paris, 1802), p. 40.

41. CO/87/64, O'Connor to Labouchere, 23 October 1857; Park, p. 3; Georges Legrand, "La Gambie, notes historiques et géographiques," *Bulletin du comité d'études historiques et scientifiques de l'Afrique occidentale française*, XI (1928), 442.

42. P. Holderer, "Coutume Mandingue du Ouli," in *Coutumiers juridiques de l'Afrique occidentale française*, I: Sénégal (Paris, 1939), contains much information about the kingship, traditions of origin, etc. (328 ff). See also Park, pp. 25–26; William Gray and Staff Surgeon Dochart, *Travels in Western Africa* (London, 1825), p. 87. According to Holderer there was a period when the office of Mansa Wuli was transmitted collaterally (p. 328); Rançon confirms this for the period after the jihad in the 1890s when the kings were weakest (p. 69).

43. Sherif Jammeh, interview, Illiasa, 26 October 1965.

new mansa was accepted elsewhere in the state without formal ratification.⁴⁴ When a mansa died the fact was sometimes not formally acknowledged for several months while arrangements were made for the election of a successor.

Not surprisingly, exceptions to the customary pattern of succession are reported. For example, Moore found the kingship of Tomani had been "usurped" by one of the deceased mansa's sons, who ruled for a number of years without acknowledging his father's death. One of the mansas of Niani in the seventeenth century, the son of a member of the royal lineage by one of his concubines, was deposed and exiled in favor of one of his half-brothers who was the son of a full wife. In Niumi the suma of a town out of order of succession led a revolt against the mansa and was exiled.⁴⁵ Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century there are records of violations of the order of succession in the river states owing to the ambiguities of polygamous marriage and concubinage, the frustrations of collateral succession, and the cumbersome pattern of rotation from one town to another. These tensions sometimes found violent expression—as when one of the sons of the Mansa Niumi joined a rebellion against his father during the 1850s—but generally, as the population grew, segments led by younger brothers or sons peacefully left older settlements to form new communities. Thus, the younger brother of the founder of Berending, one of Niumi's royal towns, moved off to settle at Sika, and later, the son of another Mansa Niumi left to found Bunyadu.⁴⁶

Limitations on the Kingship

The power of the Mandingo rulers was by no means unlimited even at its height. Political competition within the states centered largely on the sharing of taxes and other revenues from the use of the land. These were divided between the mansa and his family

44. G. Lorimer, "Report on the History and Previous Native Administration of Niumi," 1942, Archives of the Gambia; Jere Sanyang, interview, Kwinella, 19 October 1965.

45. CO/87/73, d'Arcy to Newcastle, 24 May 1862; Moore, p. 138; Jobson, p. 80; T. E. Bowdich, *Excursions in Madeira and Porto Santo* (London, 1825), p. 215.

46. Landing Omar Sonko, interview, Sika, 28 October 1965; G. Lorimer, "Report on the History and Previous Native Administration of Niumi," 1942, Archives of the Gambia.

and the leaders of other lineages. During the first half of the nineteenth century the French at Albreda paid customs to the mansa, his chief minister, the alkali of the mansa's town, and the alkali of Albreda.⁴⁷ Sometimes this distribution of taxes was weighted against the mansa. In 1850, for example, the British paid the alkali of Jillifry twice the amount of customs they gave the mansa for the use of the "Ceded Mile" (granted them by the Mansa Niumi in the treaty of 1826). Since the eighteenth century the alkalis of Jillifry had collected taxes on British properties at James Island and in Jillifry itself, and by the nineteenth century had made themselves the principal intermediaries between the British and the king.⁴⁸

In all important matters such as declaration of war and peace, the mansa was constitutionally required to follow the advice of leaders of the principal lineages of towns and villages throughout the kingdom who met together in a council, or *beng*.⁴⁹ At these meetings the distribution of power seems to have been informal and responsive to the resources and capabilities of individuals, although seniority and putative lineage relationships traditionally favored the mansa and certain clans. The French traveler Golberry attended such a meeting at Berending in Niumi in 1786 after the alkali of Albreda had driven traders from his town. At a previous meeting the alkali had succeeded in obtaining support for his policies from a majority of town leaders against the mansa and his minister, who valued the trade and customs brought by the French *comptoir*. The French had then moved their establishment to the south bank. A year later, however, the mansa's party had succeeded in consolidating its position, and the council was called again to reconsider the French case.

Golberry described the clear differentiation of status and power in the council as it considered the complaints of the French company. The Europeans, as plaintiffs, were seated with the mansa and his chief adviser on a platform. Before the platform sat the alkali of Albreda, one of the parties to the complaint and the most powerful of the town chiefs. About the alkali were members

47. Hecquard, p. 143.

48. CO/87/48, MacDonnell to Grey, 10 December 1850; Park, p. 3; CO/87/62, O'Connor to Labouchere, 15 April 1856.

49. Park, p. 13; CO/87/62, O'Connor to Labouchere, 15 April 1856.

of the royal family of Berending, and around this nucleus were other town chiefs and elders of the kingdom, separated from the rest of the town's population and other spectators by a four-foot wall. The council opened one day with a full exposition of both sides of the issue. The mansa's chief adviser conspicuously presented kola nuts to the Europeans, whose side the mansa favored. The meeting was adjourned without a decision being taken. During the night the mansa's representative personally saw the majority of the village and town heads and, as previously arranged with the French, did everything possible (*"avait tout disposé"*) to obtain support for the French demands. The next day, after further discussion, a consensus was declared in favor of the Europeans. Without support of this council the mansa could not allow the French to settle at Albreda.⁵⁰

The Mandingo kings were dependent on the support of the royal lineages as well. Provision was made for cases where the king was incompetent or unpopular. An adviser, or chief minister, who exercised all but the formal functions of the kingship would be appointed by the royal family with approval of the state council. Thus, the young mansa at Berending in Niumi at the end of the eighteenth century was found unfit for his office, and the royal lineage appointed a paternal uncle (a Muslim) chief minister and virtual ruler. This was done in order to guard the lineage interests when the alkali of Albreda threatened to take control of the kingdom by appointing himself regent. The mansa was relegated to his house at Berending with a small entourage, and by generous distribution of royal wealth and with French support his minister was able to maintain the prestige of the Berending royal family.⁵¹

Commissions and Offices

The Mandingo seem not to have had a hierarchic system of state offices such as that which characterized the Wolof states to the north. There was little administrative specialization in the river states. Commissions were entrusted to wealthy and important men by the mansa meeting with his council. The mansa was barred from direct control of the state's army, although he was

50. Golberry, p. 168.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 160 ff; Legrand, p. 451.

responsible for furnishing its arms. Instead, the council chose a man of proven ability as general (*jawara*) in time of war. Not only did this man conduct the fighting but he also assumed civil authority over the state as long as he held the military commission. However, the position was temporary and could not be inherited. In the 1860s the mansa's jawara in Niumi was the suma of Essau, who led those followers remaining loyal to the mansa against the armies of the Muslim jihad and for several years ruled Niumi while the mansa remained in Bathurst. When the fighting was over, the mansa came back to Niumi, and the suma returned to his former position.⁵²

References are made in the nineteenth-century records to a few permanent and titled positions. In Niani there was a permanent group of cavalry, and a certain nonroyal lineage had hereditary rights to the title *sandige-bar* ("leader of the horse"). This position was held by the alkali of Nianibantang, who kept his title even after declaring his independence of the mansa. This title suggests that the institution may have been borrowed from the Wolof-Serer kingdoms (*bar* meaning "king" in Salum) where cavalry was also important.⁵³

In Baddibu the doorkeeper at the mansa's compound was called the *bukuneko*. The incumbent, a freeman, controlled access to the mansa and kept the "keys" of the household.⁵⁴

Thus, although status was clearly marked at meetings of the lineage leaders, there was no formally incorporated system of state offices as in some other West African societies.

Weakening of the Kingship

When the first Portuguese explorers reached the Gambia in the fifteenth century they found Mandingo "kings" ruling at the mouth of the river. In the seventeenth century Jobson had reported that three of the river kings, more powerful than the rest,

52. Bocandé, p. 59; Sherif Jammeh, interview, Illiassa, 26 October 1965.

53. CO/87/64, O'Connor to Labouchere, 14 July 1857; CO/87/66, O'Connor to Labouchere, 4 March 1858. See also P. E. H. Hair, "Ethnolinguistic Continuity on the Guinea Coast," *Journal of African History*, XIII, no. 2 (1967), 250.

54. Sherif Jammeh, interview, Illiassa, 26 October 1965; R. M. MacBair, *The Africans at Home* (London, 1864), p. 49. In Salum the *jaraf bekaneg* was in charge of the king's servants and the household while the king was away (Gamble, *The Wolof*, p. 57).

controlled the two banks of the river. One was the king of Kantora who was overlord of the south bank; another, the king of "Bursall" (Salum) who ruled half the north bank as far as the sea; and the third, the king of Wuli who was paramount from Salum to Tenda. These rulers, he said, did not go out in public "but in a manner of pompe" and could only be approached by petitioners on the knees, many casting dust on their heads.⁵⁵

The river itself, its navigability, and the ease of communications along its northern bank would seem to have been a potent factor for unification. The unity of language and social structure which differentiated the Mandingo states from their neighbors to the north and south would also have seemed likely to draw them together. Thus, it is interesting that the kings of the Mandingo states did not effectively unite during the nineteenth century against the rising Muslim power which threatened them from within their borders.

Despite factors conducive to political unification of the Gambia region, traditional Mandingo leadership by the nineteenth century was clearly fragmenting. Not only were the rulers of the river states unable to join together against their enemies, except on limited and *ad hoc* issues but they were frequently at war with one another during the early part of the century. For thirteen years the rulers of Niumi and Baddibu fought over Jokadu, a small province located between them which had revolted against Niumi's overlordship. Farther up the Gambia, the Mansa Wuli who once controlled the river's banks as far as Salum, joined the Fula from the Futa in attacks against Niani, its Mandingo neighbor. Similarly, on the south bank, the leaders of Jimara allied themselves with Fula from the Futa Jalon in an invasion of Eropina. By the 1800s, in fact, as a Mansa Combo pointed out, "Mandingo kings could not be together without danger."⁵⁶

By the middle of the nineteenth century the political organization of the states, long monopolized by their core aristocratic clans, was showing signs of severe strain. There was a marked tendency toward rigid stratification with sharp conflicts of interest between strata. For a long time the slave trade, followed by the growth of

55. Jobson, p. 65 ff.

56. CO/87/62, O'Connor to Labouchere, 15 April 1856.

the groundnut trade and an influx of European commercial interests, had more or less benefited the whole of Mandingo society. By the 1850s, however, dissatisfaction of groups excluded from the ruling clans' privileges was becoming manifest. And, despite their hereditary position, their access to wealth and the clients which it brought, their privileges and interstate alliances and ties, the position of all the rulers along the river was clearly deteriorating.

For one thing the "kings' men," that is, their clients and mercenaries, were proving to be increasingly undependable. Like the Wolof *tiedo* to the north, they were disliked and feared. By association they alienated the rulers and their parties from the rest of the population. In Niumi, Baddibu, and Combo they had established themselves beyond the mansa's control by the middle of the nineteenth century. In the 1850s the Serahuli chief, Ansumana Jaju, and his men had become the most powerful single group in Niumi. By 1854 Ansumana named himself as the mansa's chief adviser, and he and his followers ruled the kingdom in the disorderly fashion of an uncontrolled palace guard. Even today the period 1854–57 is referred to as the time "when Ansumana Jaju was king."⁵⁷ It was said at the time that he sold freemen indiscriminately as slaves, taxed merchandise, and established stockaded towns rivaling the royal capital. When the mansa finally ordered him to leave Niumi in 1857, denying his men the right to harvest their groundnuts, the Serahuli band drove him from his capital town and burned five other towns, including the port of Jillifry. The mansa finally appealed to the British to remove his unmanageable agents from the kingdom, and eventually the Serahuli were persuaded to leave for their homes in the Senegal Valley.⁵⁸

Another striking indication of the decay of the central governments in the river states was the growing independence of non-royal towns and corporate lineage groups and the disintegration of the states into territorial fragments. In 1850 the alkali of Jillifry who received twice the customs given to the king by the British, spoke for the king at meetings with the Europeans and was con-

57. CO/87/57, O'Connor to Grey, 28 August 1854; Landing Sali Sonko, interview, Essau, 29 October 1965.

58. CO/87/64, O'Connor to Labouchere, 4 April 1857.

sidered by them to be nominally supreme in Niumi. The Mansa Niumi was at war with the leaders of the state's eastern province, although he found it difficult to rally support for this from the rest of the kingdom. The population was said to be opposed to "this unholy war" which was "spoiling the country."⁵⁹

Niani had by the middle of the nineteenth century divided into three parts, and the mansa at Kataba was virtually a prisoner of the powerful Muslim alkalis of Walia, formerly an eastern district of Niani.⁶⁰ The situation of the south-bank kingdoms of the upper river was even more critical, and by the middle of the century they were no more than loose confederations.

In most of the states by the 1850s the rulers were no longer able to prohibit the walling of towns other than their own. In Tomani every provincial community was surrounded by one or even two walls, with defensive towers tall enough to dominate both the surrounding territory and the inhabitants themselves, in case of treachery. In Wuli several of the Muslim towns were walled as well as the capital, Medina. In Niani the walls of Kataba were in ruins, while those of the independent town of Nianibantang were among the most elaborate that Hecquard visited along the river. There the alkali's compound, walled and fortified, with towers and a surrounding ditch, was entered through a large gate over which were suspended the royal insignia, a pair of horns in iron chains.⁶¹

In the 1850s the mansas themselves were in some cases personally ill-equipped to improve their positions. The Mansa Baddibu was a boy of "about eighteen," while the Mansa Niani was "an aged and infirm man." Once an able leader, the Mansa Wuli in 1854 was "the wreck of a fine man."⁶²

The end of the eighteenth century had seen the stagnation of the trans-Atlantic slave trade from the Gambia on which the ruling families had come to depend for their revenues. Mungo Park reported that the trade had slumped even before the British declaration of 1807 and the establishment of a post (Bathurst) at the

59. CO/87/57, O'Connor to Grey, 28 August 1854; CO/87/52, MacDonnell to Pakington, 12 July 1852.

60. CO/87/66, O'Connor to Labouchere, 4 March 1858.

61. Hecquard, pp. 158 ff, 187; Fox, p. 450.

62. CO/87/57, O'Connor to Newcastle, 1 February 1854; CO/87/55, O'Connor to Newcastle, 8 July 1853.

mouth of the river to stamp out the remnants of the trade.⁶³ Forty years of the nineteenth century were to pass before an acceptable substitute for slaving was found to provide a base for the river economy. The groundnut producers sold directly to traders from European companies based in Bathurst. They were, therefore, less vulnerable to the heavy taxation which the Mandingo landlords had imposed on the slave merchants with their large caravans as they wound their way slowly through the river states on their way to the sea. Cash and trade goods were now being diffused among the Gambia populations and the rulers' monopolies suffered.

The growing intrusion of European influence in the river valley contributed to the decline of traditional authorities. European settlements in the Senegambia at the middle of the nineteenth century were thinly spread and weak: the French were primarily concerned with the Senegal Valley, while the British along the Gambia were strictly enjoined by the metropolitan authorities from interfering in African affairs. Nevertheless, the continual interplay between local colonists and inhabitants of the river states involved its participants in a steadily tightening net of tangled relationships which eventually drew them into partition of the Senegambia. By 1850 the policies of local British officials had brought both the British Colony and the Mandingo ruling classes into a close alignment of interests. The British depended on the Mandingo kings and village chiefs to maintain the modicum of order necessary for trade within the river states, while the Mandingo leaders consolidated their own positions by customs and gifts from the Europeans. In the long run this was a debilitating relationship for the Mandingo rulers who were held responsible for the protection of European interests often opposed to those of their own people. Furthermore, by imposing fixed stipends in lieu of the traditional system of *ad hoc* charges, the British further reduced the wealth and political options open to the river rulers.⁶⁴

Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century the dominance of the Mandingo ruling clans, which had lasted nearly 300 years,

63. Park, pp. 17-18.

64. See Chapter 4.

was almost at an end. Although the mansas of the river states had long preserved their position of special privilege associated with lineage rights to the land, by 1850 the political balance they had maintained between their interests and those of the other groups and institutions within their increasingly polyglot states was decisively tipped against them. Another political organization had emerged within each of the river kingdoms—one whose incorporating principles were fundamentally opposed to those of the traditional politics.

3

The Rise of Islam in the Gambia

By the middle of the nineteenth century a supratribal grouping had appeared along the Gambia which would challenge traditional Mandingo supremacy. The spread of Islam to the Senegambia had been accompanied by a proliferation of Muslim political institutions, and an Islamic shadow state was emerging which threatened patterns of established Mandingo rule. The terms *Soninke* and *Marabout* had, in fact, become the most important expressions of sociopolitical classification in the Senegambia, and social status was closely tied to religious identity.

In a ritual context *Soninke* was used as a synonym for the Arabic *kafir* (unbeliever), a term for animists or Muslims who failed to observe Islamic practices. *Marabout*, meaning cleric or teacher, was a term associated with the saint cults of North Africa. In the Senegambia it referred to all who accepted a purified form of Islam. The symbol of the differences between the two groups was highly individual and particularized: if a man drank alcoholic beverages he was considered a "Soninke"; if not, he was a "Marabout." Politically these terms represented a division of the population into two sharply opposed factions which cut across ethnic and traditional political groupings. *Soninke* popularly defined the ruling party of aristocratic families and their followers, while *Marabout* referred to all those excluded from land ownership and the highest offices of the state.

The Bearers of Islam

When Portuguese adventurers reached the Gambia in the fif-

teenth century they found Muslim advisers already established in the courts of the Mandingo rulers. Takrur, a Fula state on the Senegal River, sent missionaries to Wolof, Fula, and Mandingo communities who may have reached the Gambia; Fernandes reported that priests from Morocco were teaching among the Wolof north of the Gambia.¹ Nevertheless, it was probably Dyula and other long-distance traders from Mali who systematically introduced Islam into the Gambia during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries as they established their communities along the river banks.

By the seventeenth century a local clerical class had emerged in the Gambia states. Muslim priests were welcomed by nonbelievers, as well as by those who had been converted to Islam, for their skills in education, magic, and medicine. They enjoyed a high status in the communities they visited. Though barred from holding office within the traditional political hierarchy of the Mandingo states, they frequently served as advisers to the rulers. Because of their literacy and wide commercial connections, they could offer a variety of services.

Koranic verses encased in small leather pouches were worn as amulets by animists and Muslims alike to guard against a variety of evils.² Mungo Park was told they could protect the owner from snake or alligator bites, "hostile weapons," and thirst and hunger and were generally worn "to conciliate the favour of superior powers under all the circumstances and occurrences of life."³ These amulets were attached to houses, to animals, and to valued possessions as well. In 1850 the Mansa Jarra, who seems in this respect to have been typical of the rulers of the river states, had, according to Hecquard, a marabout to manufacture such amulets, whom he treated very well and showered with gifts.⁴

A high value was placed on marabout prayers. Even today it is

1. Valentim Fernandes, *Description de la côte occidentale d'Afrique*, trans. T. Monod, A. Teixeira da Mota, R. Mauny (Bissau, 1951), pp. 8–9.

2. Richard Jobson, *The Golden Trade* (1623; London, 1932), pp. 67, 105; T. E. Poole, *Life, Scenery and Customs in Sierra Leone and the Gambia* (London, 1850), II, 109, 158.

3. Mungo Park, *Travels of Mungo Park*, ed. Ronald Miller (1795; London, 1954), p. 28.

4. Hyacinthe Hecquard, *Voyage sur la côte et dans l'intérieur de l'Afrique occidentale* (Paris, 1855), p. 149.

said that the reason Marabouts settled at Kwinella, one of the old Soninke capitals of Kiang, was "so they could pray for them [the Soninkes]."⁵ Such prayers seem at this time to have related to fairly specific and decidedly worldly ambitions. At the end of the eighteenth century Park found marabouts traveling about the countries around the river "insuring success to any enterprise" by their prayers.⁶ Jobson described a cattle caravan crossing the Gambia with a marabout—seconded by a man with a drawn bow—standing in a canoe murmuring prayers for the protection of the animals from crocodiles.⁷ Traditions in Jokadu, an eastern district of Niumi, tell of a marabout who was hired for a crock of gold to pray for the victory of a group which was rebelling against the mansa.⁸ These are only two of many similar stories.

Marabouts were sought out for their medical knowledge as well. In the middle of the nineteenth century they knew techniques of bleeding and leeching, they gave hot vapor baths for fever, and they were skilled in setting fractures. A common remedy was a drink made by washing a verse of the Koran off a slate. If made with a relevant verse, it could also bring the man who drank it to political office before his competitors.⁹

In contrast to the life of animist Mandingo settlements in the Gambia where society was based on long-established ties with a particular piece of land, themes of wandering and displacement were characteristic of the Islamized communities in the nineteenth century. Patterns of nomadic drift, migration, and transhumance were part of the background of Fula groups who moved north from Portuguese Guinea across the Gambia during the sixteenth century. Moore reported in the eighteenth century that many of the Fula were among the most conspicuously Islamized

5. Kemi Sensang, interview, Kwinella, 19 October 1965.

6. Park, p. 214.

7. Jobson, p. 23.

8. N. Ashton, "Historical Report, North Bank Province," 1944, Archives of the Gambia. Shortly after the same priest was said to have resold his services to the Mansa Niumi for double the price. Partially bound by his previous commitment, he could only pray that Jokadu defeat itself. This is the explanation given for the destruction two groups of Jokadu's army inflicted on one another, each mistaking the other for the enemy.

9. L. J. B. Béranger-Féraud, *Les peuplades de la Sénégambie* (Paris, 1879), p. 141; Francis Moore, *Travels into the Inland Parts of Africa* (London, 1738), p. 39; Park, pp. 211–12.

of the Gambian populations.¹⁰ Mandingo and Serahuli long-distance traders and "strange farmers," traveling hundreds of miles each year, also carried Islam throughout the river valley. When Mandingo agriculturalists first settled in Kiang, it is said they found a family whose name was Jarju (ethnic identity unknown) wandering about the region teaching Islam.¹¹

Traditions in Baddibu, as in many of the other river states, say that the Muslims came to Baddibu from every direction during the nineteenth century—from Kiang, Jarra, Jokadu, and from the north.¹² In pursuit of knowledge, students would travel long distances to the marabout schools. Some left the south-bank states for Futa Tuba, in the Futa Jalon, where a Mandingo scholar, Karamba Jabi, is reported to have been teaching at the beginning of the nineteenth century.¹³ Others went to Karantaba, south of the Gambia, where Fode Setan had assembled a group of students.¹⁴ A boy eight years old traveled in 1776 from Niani Maru to a well-known Koranic school at Darsalami in northern Wuli, returning home again to be circumcised when he was sixteen.¹⁵ Students at these schools worked hard, tending the master's fields and his cattle by day, studying only at night or before dawn. The parents of each child were charged as much as a slave or a horse for his tuition, and the pupil could be kept at work on the marabout's farm until the fee was paid. In return the teacher was supposed to provide board and room for his students. Some schoolmasters, taking students and books with them, traveled from village to village, trading and selling amulets and blessings to support themselves.¹⁶

10. Moore, p. 30. However, Hecquard reported that in 1850 many Fula were as lax as the Mandingo Soninke in their observances. The pastoral Fula had always been animist (Hecquard, pp. 172, 191).

11. M. R. Haswell, *Economics of Agriculture in a Savannah Village* (London, 1953), p. 13.

12. N'Famara Singhatey, interview, Saba, 27 October 1965.

13. Jawuru Kurubali, interview, Kobakunda, 21 October 1965.

14. Hecquard, p. 134.

15. Captain Washington, "Some Account of Mohanmedu-Sisei, a Mandingo of Nyani-Marú on the Gambia," *Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London*, VIII (1838), 449.

16. Jobson, p. 105 ff; Jean Baptiste Labat, *Nouvelle relation de l'Afrique occidentale*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1728), IV, 353; Frédéric Carrère and Paul Holle, *De la Sénégambie française* (Paris, 1855), p. 59. See also Cheikh Kane, *L'aventure ambiguë* (Paris, 1962). Mungo Park stayed with the schoolmaster at Kamalia, a Mandingo town in Manding, east of the Gambia, and described the school at

By the middle of the nineteenth century Muslim clerics had established themselves in nearly all of the Mandingo states of the Gambia. There were communities of practicing Muslims of every ethnic background except Jola and Serer, who generally retained their traditional religion. A map drawn in 1751 shows six "Morokunda," as these Muslim communities were called, in Niani alone; three in Niumi; and one each in Tomani, Eropina, Jarra, Combo, Salum, and Baddibu.¹⁷ By 1850 Mandingo inhabitants of the trading communities in the river states, as well as Torodo living in Niani, Baddibu, and Jokadu, and Fula pressing into the south-bank states from the Futa Jalon, called themselves Marabout.

Although exposure to Islam was widespread and in some cases of considerable depth, it is difficult to estimate with any accuracy what proportion of the population was Islamized. By the mid-nineteenth century riverside towns were settled generally by traders, who were frequently Muslim. The number of converts by all accounts was increasing. Nevertheless, Hecquard and other travelers reported that Islam was still the religion of a minority in the river states and that animists, or Muslims observing a plurality of religious practices, remained in the majority. Jola communities on the south bank and Serer on the north successfully defended their traditional beliefs as part of their rejection of all pressures from outside their societies.¹⁸

Islamic Observances in the Gambia

Islam came to the Senegambia in what orthodox scholars consider a contaminated form. The Sufi brotherhoods, of which

some length. Most of the children were of pagan parents. When "any one of them has read through the Koran, and performed a certain number of public prayers, a feast is prepared by the schoolmaster, and the scholar undergoes an examination, or (in European terms) *takes out his degree*. I attended at three different inaugurations of this sort, and heard with pleasure the distinct and intelligent answers which the scholars frequently gave to the Bushreens who assembled on those occasions, and acted as examiners. When the Bushreens [Marabouts] had satisfied themselves respecting the learning and abilities of the scholar, the last page of the Koran was put into his hand, and he was desired to read it aloud; after the boy had finished this lesson, he pressed the paper against his forehead, and pronounced the word *Amen*; upon which all the Bushreens rose, and shaking him cordially by the hand, bestowed upon him the title of Bushreen" (Park, pp. 242-43).

17. J. M. Gray, *A History of the Gambia* (1940; New York, 1966), p. 328.

18. Hecquard, p. 172; Park, p. 11; Bérenger-Féraud, pp. 205-6.

Qadiriya was, until the 1860s, the most important in the Gambia, had attempted to restore a personal communion with God after centuries of orthodox scholasticism and depersonalization. In doing so they buried the essentials of Islamic law beneath a heavy layer of mystical pantheism. Instead of the orthodox belief in the otherness of God, they emphasized the presence of God in all aspects of life and tolerated much of the pre-Islamic background of belief in the African communities.¹⁹

In writing of court ritual in the Mandingo states, Jobson described the striking mixture of animist and Islamic practices which was common at the beginning of the seventeenth century. At that time, the "king" of Cassan (Lower Niani), a Soninke who drank alcoholic beverages, was accustomed to touch his principal Islamic amulet with the contents of the first cup at a sitting.²⁰

Any commoner approaching one of the river mansas laid his hand on the ground

and then on the toppe of his owne uncovered head, many of them taking up the dust, and laying it upon his bare-head, which action he useth twice or thrise . . . and if it chance in any company or resort unto him, that there be a Mary-bucke, which be their priests . . . hee fals to praying . . . for the preservation of the King, and in the same blessing him, to which himselfe . . . useth the word *Amena, Amena*, many times over, which signifies the same as we say, Amen or so be it.²¹

In assigning land for a European trading site to Jobson in 1621—an act closely tied to the mansa's status in the traditional community—the mingling of Islamic and animist ritual was intense:

the King spake, that . . . he would freely give us all that countrey we were in . . . upon these words, Buckor Sano [Jobson's Dyula trader] puld his shirt over his head . . . kneeling naked from the wast upward untill the Mary-bucks I had with me, and another that was with the King, had scrapt together a great quantity of dust, sand, and small gravell . . . they lightly cov-

ered him, from the head to the heele, when presently hee taking his hands full of the earth, throwes it this way, and that way, after a carelesse manner, everywhere round about him. Which done . . . the Marybucks gathered together a round heape of the same dust, and with their hands made likewise of dust, a Circle, a small distance of, round about the heape, in which Circle, one of them did write with his finger, in the Character they use, so much as the Circle would containe: this performed, Buckor Sano . . . tooke a full mouthfull, which presently he spet and . . . both our Mary-buckes, with their handsfull in the like manner, and threw the earth into my lappe.²²

It would be a mistake, however, to underrate the importance of early conversions to Islam along the Gambia River. After the fall of Mali and the decay of long-distance trade with the interior, nuclei of devout Muslims continued to observe many of the five pillars of Islamic faith, and exposure to Arabic writings laid the foundation for the more general and orthodox conversions of the nineteenth century. The continuing presence of Islam, though maintained by a minority of the population, was a theme running through the history of the Gambia states and is as important for an understanding of nineteenth-century reform as the wide spread of apostasy and disbelief. This was true from the sixteenth century, when a Portuguese traveler found three *zawiya* along the river whose members were remarkable for their prayers and fasts and for their insistence on eating meat slaughtered in accordance with the ritual prescribed by the Koran,²³ through to the 1860s when Maba, the leader of militant reform in the Gambia, declared his jihad, and followers came to him from established Muslim communities on both banks of the river.

It seems clear that in addition to the Koran and Shari'a at least some of the literature of Western Sudanese religious thought made its way to the Gambia as early as the seventeenth century. Jobson found that marabouts in the river states had access to

great bookes, all manuscripts of their Religion, and . . . we have seene, when companies of Mary-buckes have travelled by us,

19. See Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *The Tijaniyya* (London, 1965); H. A. R. Gibb, *Mohammedanism: An Historical Survey*, 2d ed. (New York, 1962), p. 127 ff.

20. Jobson, p. 83.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 66.

22. *Ibid.*, p. 135.

23. Quoted from André Alvares d'Almada (1594) in *L'Islam noir*, by Vincent Monteil (Paris, 1964), p. 125.

some of their people laden therewith, many of them being very great and of a large volume.²⁴

At Kamalia, a Mandingo town east of the Gambia, Mungo Park found the local schoolmaster owned, in addition to the Koran "and a book or two of commentaries thereon . . . a variety of manuscripts, which had partly been purchased from the trading Moors, and partly borrowed from Bushreens in the neighbourhood, and copied with great care."²⁵

There were in the Western Sudan by the nineteenth century "a number of highly sophisticated Muslim scholars who were well-versed in the basic tenets of Islam and well-acquainted with the obligations incumbent upon themselves and other Muslims."²⁶ The Mandingo had a reputation for learning, and a Wolof Christian priest writing in 1853 compared the Mandingo marabouts favorably to the Wolof, after meeting a Gambian merchant at Timbukto "who was very learned in all the science of the Moors."²⁷

Because of their exposure to the body of doctrine and obligations which form the center of Islamic religious life, the visible signs of conversion to Islam—the prayers, proscriptions, fasts, and the pilgrimage—frequently were observed by communities along the Gambia. There were reports in Jobson's time that the rituals of prayer and the ablutions were rigidly practiced in the Muslim towns. Moore wrote that the Ramadan fast was carefully kept and that the "Mahometans . . . those who can write Arabick, are very strict at their Devotions three or four Times a Day,"²⁸ By the nineteenth century Marabout towns that had not yet built a mosque, set aside areas for public worship. In 1850 the mosque at Sabajy in Combo was considered the largest in the Senegambia.²⁹

The Islamic Shadow State

From early times Muslims in the Gambia lived apart in villages

24. Jobson, p. 101.

25. Park, p. 240.

26. John Ralph Willis, "Jihad Fi Sabil Allah—Its Doctrinal Basis in Islam and Some Aspects of its Evolution in Nineteenth-Century West Africa," *Journal of African History*, VIII (1967), 399.

27. P.-D. Boilat, *Esquisses Sénégalaises* (Paris, 1853), p. 427.

28. Moore, p. 39.

29. CO/87/55, O'Connor to Newcastle, 8 June 1853.

and wards of their own, "separated from the common people, both in their habitations and course of lives."³⁰ The practice of withdrawal from established settlements for political or theological reasons went back to the Hegira. It was a pattern repeated frequently during the period of militant Islamic reform in West Africa. The towns along the riverfront of the Gambia states in the 1850s generally were inhabited by Muslims claiming to have withdrawn from settlements in the interior in protest against their "lax morals." They chose the sites of their new villages well, as there they controlled the export of the river's groundnut crop.

The Muslims settled as individuals or in nuclear-family groups in contrast to Soninke communities oriented to large, extended-family units. Many Muslims came as traders and traveled a great deal, leaving agricultural work to be performed by slaves and women. The women also traded locally and looked after their husbands' business affairs while they were away.

Life in these settlements was permeated by Islamic custom and law affecting diet, dress, prayer, and virtually all facets of social existence. By its comprehensiveness—proscribing certain foods, drinks, marriage to non-Muslims, and so forth—Muslim law exerted steady pressures on all spheres of life. Concerned to regulate the relations of the Faithful with God and with one another, as well as the political institutions of the society, it provided the religious ethic to define every act. The law was drawn from a number of doctrinal sources: the Koran (the small body of direct revelation), the Hadith (authentic traditions of the Prophet), and the consensus of the learned community in later times (*ijma'*).

Thus, for example, the drinking of alcohol and the eating of pork were prohibited. Women could marry only Muslim men. The place for public prayer, a communal institution, was cared for by the village age-groups. By the nineteenth century there was often a local Koranic school for the male children of the community.³¹

The judicial hierarchy of each of the Mandingo states consisted of the mansa and the alkali, each with his council. In Soninke

30. Jobson, p. 84.

31. Fernandes, p. 45; Jobson, pp. 84, 89 ff; Park, p. 203 ff; William Gray and Staff Surgeon Dochart, *Travels in Western Africa* (London, 1825), p. 57; André Rançon, *Dans la Haute-Gambie; voyage d'exploration scientifique, 1891-1892* (Paris, 1894), p. 20.

communities and in the mansa's courts, issues were decided on the basis of unwritten custom. Proceedings in the Marabout towns in the nineteenth century were ordered according to Muslim law, and Marabouts interpreted the law before the courts, acting as prosecuting or defense lawyers.³²

Each Marabout village had its own alkali (secular chief) and almami (religious leader). Not all the Marabouts lived in separate towns, however. Many formed wards (*kabilolu*) attached to Soninke communities, as in Bateling, one of the capitals of Kiang, where there was a Marabout as well as a Soninke *kabilo*. One alkali (a Soninke) represented the entire town. The *kabila-tio* of the Marabout ward sat on the village council, ranking below the *kabila-tio* of the Soninke community. At Kwinella, also in Kiang, the *kabila-tio* had a voice in choosing the Mansa Kiang.³³ Above the village level a network of trading associations, educational ties, and friendships linked Muslim communities along the Gambia.

Muslims settled together primarily because of common occupational and religious interests rather than because of lineage ties. Not all the Muslim towns along the Gambia were settled by traders, clerics, or alien migrants, however, nor could all Muslims be distinguished occupationally from the neighboring animist agriculturists. Children of animists as well as those of Muslim parents attended Koranic schools and eventually stayed on to join the Muslim community. Younger sons or those excluded from an inheritance left their towns to join the Marabouts or to found their own Muslim villages. Groups sharing village lands, pasturage, and schools frequently found themselves divided between the opposing sides during the jihad irrespective of lineage connections.

Thus, by the middle of the nineteenth century within the framework of the traditional Mandingo states and their elaborate façade of kingship, traditions, and patterns of succession were two societies, each with its law and customs, interacting at some levels but essentially in opposition to one another at the level of basic principles of incorporation. Until the 1860s, however, the two groups lived side by side with little open conflict between them.

32. Park, pp. 13–14.

33. M. Sanyang, interview, Kerewan, 27 October 1965; Jere Sanyang, interview, Kwinella, 19 October 1965; Hecquard, p. 129.

Weakening of Traditional Religion

Although the Soninkes were still in a majority and maintained control over the land, they had little to offer ritually as an alternative to Islam. Mandingo animism and Islam both had suffered from their mutual contact, and long before the nineteenth century the traditional religion had become impoverished and anemic.³⁴

Cults of family and territorial spirits continued to be observed in the Mandingo communities into the twentieth century, but the annual communal rites associated with them elsewhere in Mande-speaking areas are not reported from the Gambia. The secret society Hore had lost its vitality after the eighteenth century. Islam vehemently opposed such secret organizations, and where they were not destroyed it tended to assimilate them into the Muslim fold. Sacred groves which would have been reserved for secret-society initiations, for example, were used for Muslim circumcision ceremonies.³⁵ Park reported that at the end of the eighteenth century he found circumcision regarded "not . . . so much in the light of a religious ceremony, as a matter of convenience and utility . . . to render the marriage state prolific."³⁶

The cult of the ancestors, particularly that of the kings, once marked by human sacrifice and elaborate ritual, declined into empty formalism. The funerals of kings in the nineteenth century provided a time for feasting and political maneuvering but seem to have included little ritual beyond wrapping the body in white cloth and burying it in a hut or under a tree.³⁷ Informants interviewed by a British administrator in Niumi in the 1940s asserted

34. Yves Person, who has studied Mandingo animism during the nineteenth century in the sub-Saharan zone of the Upper Niger has written that the wide spread of Islamic magic and the infiltration of Islamic rituals had undermined the cults of the secret societies there and *Ndomo*, *Nama*, *Komo*, and others had disappeared north of the Kankan-Kouroussa line, west of the Gambia in the Futa Jalon ("La jeunesse de Samory," *Revue française d'histoire d'outre-mer* XLIX (1962), 162–63.

35. Fernandes, p. 45.

36. Park, p. 203. Trimmingham writes that the "effect of Islam is to desacralize circumcision," turning it into an ordinary purification rite (*Islam in West Africa* [London, 1964], p. 162).

37. Hecquard, pp. 173, 179; Park, p. 212. Compare this with Fernandes' description of a mansa's burial at the beginning of the sixteenth century when the corpse was interred with his arms, his chief wife, and his principal servants in a large underground room covered with a small mound of earth (p. 39).

that by the middle of the nineteenth century the kingship had lost its ancient sacerdotal significance as the continuing tie between the land and those who used it in the past, present, and future.³⁸ In 1862 the remains of Demba Sonko, who had been Mansa Niumi during the 1850s, were disinterred and scattered about by a Muslim band.³⁹

Not only had traditional animist beliefs weakened by the 1850s but the royal families of the Mandingo states were themselves divided on the subject of religion. Traditions preserved in Genieri, a village in Kiang, tell of how the youngest of the sons of Mamba Sane, the founder of Genieri, became friendly with a family of Muslims wandering the district teaching Islam. The son came home one day and told his family that he wished to become a Muslim. After quarreling over this with his four older brothers, he left with his wives and children to live at the village of Kaiaf. His conversion meant that he automatically renounced his right to the kingship of Kiang after the death of his elder brothers, as Muslims were constitutionally ineligible for traditional offices in all the Mandingo states. It is said that hard feelings continued between the two segments of the family, and when the religious wars broke out in the 1860s the Muslims at Kaiaf called in Marabout warriors from Combo to assist them against the Soninke rulers of Kiang.⁴⁰

In Niumi the suma of Essau, head of an important part of the royal family and war leader for the state, was converted to Islam at the time that the mansa's Serahuli mercenaries were devastating the country. The suma continued to support the mansa and was his war leader against the Marabouts throughout the period of the later jihad. Demba Sonko's son, however, joined the Muslim Serahuli against his father.⁴¹

By the 1850s the Soninkes did not have a great deal to offer politically as an alternative to growing Marabout power. Weakened by the loss of control over trade and revenues following the decline of the slave trade, they saw more and more of the wealth

38. G. Lorimer, "Report on the History and Previous Native Administration of Niumi," 1942, Archives of the Gambia.

39. CO/87/73, d'Arcy to Newcastle, 24 May 1862.

40. Haswell, p. 13 ff.

41. CO/87/76, d'Arcy to Newcastle, 23 March 1863; Landing Sali Sonko, interview, Essau, 29 October 1965; CO/87/64, O'Connor to Labouchere, 14 May 1857.

from the trade in groundnuts passing into the hands of the Marabouts living near the river and in direct contact with the European factors. Numbers of the strangers who flooded into the Gambia states, and who raised over a third of the groundnut crop along the river were fervent Muslims from the Senegal and Niger valleys.

There were many signs of Muslim power during the first half of the nineteenth century. The Muslim alkali of Jillifry, for example, received twice the revenues from land leased to Europeans as the Mansa Niumi, and spoke for the mansa at public meetings. Similarly, the wealthiest man in Baddibu by the middle of the nineteenth century, one of the principal groundnut-growing areas along the river, was Jata Jagne, a Muslim.⁴²

Marabout towns in the river states had begun to construct heavy defensive walls, while Soninke villages were left unfortified. By the 1850s the alkali of Walia, who was a Muslim, had taken virtually all power from the Mansa Niani at Kataba. At the same time the Mansa Baddibu was unable to travel without permission of his head marabout lest he "lose his crown."⁴³ As one Soninke leader, the alkali of Kwinella put it, "some of my people have been trading and have got rich and I cannot govern them."⁴⁴

It was in the context of the progressive weakening of the traditional rule in the Mandingo states and of the increased power of the Marabout minority that the glacial spread of Islam quickened in the space of a few years to a violent and sweeping transfiguration of society.

The Context of the Gambian Religious Revival

The movement for religious revival and political reform along the Gambia lay within a lengthy continuum of revolutionary activity by Islamic leaders both in Fula and Wolof-dominated areas of the Senegambia, extending over the previous two centuries. Revolts by Islamized populations in the Futa Toro and Jolof, Cayor, and Walo in the 1670s; in Bondu in the 1690s; in the Futa Jalon around 1726; and again in the Futa Toro in the 1770s

42. Sherif Kinte, interview, Kintekunda, 26 October 1965.

43. CO/87/62, O'Connor to Labouchere, 4 March 1856; CO/87/57, O'Connor to Newcastle, 1 February 1854.

44. John Morgan, *Reminiscences of the Founding of a Christian Mission on the Gambia* (London, 1864), p. 15.

had toppled ruling elites and established instead in each, however briefly (in Futa Toro and the Wolof states for less than 10 years during the seventeenth century), a form of theocratic rule under the titular leadership of an almami. These dynasties survived in Bondu and the Futa Jalon into the nineteenth century, although by then the ruling classes in Bondu had begun to come under critical attack from a new generation of reformers. Itinerant Muslim scholars and traders must have drawn the Gambian Marabouts into close contact with this rich background of agitation and revolt.⁴⁵

Ties with the interior of West Africa, where jihads had succeeded in changing the political order in Macina and in Hausaland during the nineteenth century, are less well defined. However, we know that al-Hajj Umar, leader of the Senegambian revival in Futa Toro and states north and east of the Gambia, traveled throughout these areas during his pilgrimage before meeting with Marabout leaders along the Gambia at the middle of the century.⁴⁶

Certainly the parallels with Usman Dan Fodio's movement in Hausaland are striking. There, town Fulani formed a small, highly educated Islamized group deprived of secular authority within the mass of the population. Under the conditions existing in Hausaland at the time, the combined promises and demands of a militant transcendentalist doctrine were appealing. For a long time the Hausa states had been under military pressure from their more powerful neighbors, and increasingly a burden of exploitive taxation fell upon the population, particularly the Fulani, an unassimilated minority. A sense of political and economic discrimination wove itself into Fulani puritanical beliefs and was expressed in denunciations of specific injustices, of religious deviation, and of paganism, and in an attempt to reconstruct a theoretically ideal Muslim state based on a fundamentalist interpretation of Islamic law. The problem of the Fulani reformers, like that of the Gambian Marabout leaders, was to extend the religious focus of a dedicated nucleus to other groups within the states and to profit from a shared sense of dissatisfaction in con-

45. See Philip Curtin, "Jihad in West Africa," *Journal of African History*, XII (1971), 11-24.

46. See Chapter 5.

structing a corporate Islamic society. The law which the jihad leaders tried to impose in the Hausa states concerned social institutions as well as man's relationship with God.⁴⁷

By 1850 the dissatisfactions of the Marabouts of the Senegambia were provoking overt forms of protest and revolt. The principles of religious revival had continued to be taught in the Wolof states to the north of the Gambia and by the middle of the century there was a large and fervent body of Muslims, particularly in Cayor where scholars of regional fame attracted pupils from the Gambia. Although Marabouts in the Wolof areas had achieved a measure of political power in the courts of the kings, they were excluded from the core of families constitutionally eligible to rule. As in the Gambia states, the damel of Cayor was unable to control his own agents (tiedos) who were intensely resented by the rest of the population because of their depredations, energetic drinking, and militant nonbelief in Islam. Thus, resistance to the inequities of the traditional order by the nineteenth century had come to be expressed in terms of religious reform, and a series of revolts broke out in the Wolof states under Marabout leadership.⁴⁸

Within the Gambia states there had been an uprising of Muslims against Soninke leadership at the end of the eighteenth century on the south bank which had ended in a battle at Kwinella in Kiang and a rout of the Marabout forces. In the 1840s a group of Muslims living south of the Gambia in the upper Casamance called in the Fulbe Futo from the Futa Jalon to help them throw off Soninke rule. The Soninke Mandingo, assisted by animist Fula pastoralists, succeeded in defeating the intruders as they pushed north toward the Gambia. Nevertheless, by the end of the decade all Mandingo areas of the Casamance, except for a few Soninke villages around the French fort at Sedhiou, had fallen under Marabout domination.⁴⁹

Similarly, in the 1840s Marabouts in Jimara allied themselves

47. See Muhammad Al-Hajj, "The Fulani Concept of Jihad: Shehu Uthman dan Fodio," *Odu: University of Ife Journal of African Studies*, I (July, 1964), 45-58.

48. Gaspard Mollien, *Travels in Africa to the Sources of the Senegal and Gambia in 1818* (London, 1820), p. 23 ff; Monteil, p. 344.

49. CO/87/80, d'Arcy to Cardwell, 24 October 1864; Boilat, p. 413; Bertrand Bocandé, "Lettre à M. Ferdinand-Denis, 2 February 1851," *Bulletin de la société de géographie*, 4th series, II (1851), 414.

with Fula raiders from the Futa Jalon and on the north bank the alkali of Walia, head Marabout in Niani, joined the king of Bondu and Fula marauders in fighting in Niani and Wuli. In 1855 the alkali attempted to assist Muslims in the eastern districts of Salum revolting against their animist chiefs but was prevented from doing so by the Soninke alkali at Nianibantang.⁵⁰

The accusations against the Soninkes enunciated by Marabouts living along the Gambia (but excluded from land ownership and its related privileges) were largely focused on the specifics of their political-economic situation rather than abstruse theological principles. They complained that not only did the rulers of the Mandingo states refuse to convert to Islam but they moved about the country in armed bands continually harassing the Muslims, stealing their wives, properties, and slaves. The Soninkes restricted the use of land and imposed heavy taxes on strangers, often stripping them of their possessions. Often the last to settle in an area, the Marabouts were given the poorest quality land to farm, and excessive and unusual dues were levied on them.⁵¹

Many Marabouts suffered from the unruly agents (who were sometimes Muslim) of the Soninke kings. During the "reign" of Ansumana Jaju in Niumi, the principal towns of the kingdom, including Jillifry, the chief port, were burned by the rampaging Serahulis. Anne Raffanel, who visited Wuli in the 1840s, reported that the Marabouts, greatly outnumbered, were mistreated by the Soninke warriors, who took pride in rejecting, and indeed mocking, Islamic customs, while at the same time living off their depredations against the Marabouts.⁵²

David Gamble has described the flight of Muslims from their homes near Illiassa, one of the Soninke capitals in Baddibu, to the banks of the river, where they felt they would be more secure. They established themselves near Saba with the permission of the alkali and elders of Saba, who were descendants of the first settlers in the area. But, as they were the last Mandingo to arrive in the dis-

50. Hecquard, p. 93.

51. CO/87/74, d'Arcy to Newcastle, 24 October 1862; CO/87/80, d'Arcy to Cardwell, 24 October 1864; Sherif Kinte, interview, Kintekunda, 26 October 1965.

52. Anne Raffanel, *Voyage dans l'Afrique occidentale, 1843-44* (Paris, 1846), p. 491.

trict, there was little land left to assign them, and what there was was of poor quality. As the village grew the land was insufficient for its needs and the Marabouts remained dissatisfied with their lot.⁵³

The Outbreak of Revolution in Combo

These grievances finally resulted in violence which broke out in the south-bank state of Combo in the 1840s, characterized by many of the elements present in the revolution which swept the north bank of the river during the rest of the century. In a sense, this was a dry run for the later wars, and some of the themes of interaction between traditional, Islamic, and European communities appeared here on a smaller scale.

Combo was the south-bank state closest to the Atlantic and to the British colony of Bathurst at the mouth of the river. The mansa, Suling Jatta, and the Soninkes of Combo controlled no more than the central portion of the kingdom. Marabouts dominated the south from their chief town, Gunjur, and the north from Sabajy and Brifut. The Soninkes and the Marabouts both had hired Serahuli, Serer, and Jola mercenaries, and fighting consisted largely of desultory raids, cattle-stealing, and isolated reprisals.

At first both sides of the dispute in Combo were anxious to appease the British whose colony and farms on the mainland were so close to the fighting. The mansa, offering the colonists land in Upper Combo if they would destroy Sabajy, said that he and his followers would convert to Christianity if necessary, though they would never become Muslim. The Marabouts, though adamant against European innovations, phrased their rejection of British mediation in conciliatory language and agreed to leave British subjects and property strictly alone.⁵⁴

Rivalry between the two groups came to center on the town of Sabajy in northern Combo. The alkali there was one of the Soninke mansa's closest relatives and had been ill and bedridden for a long time. Real power in the town was exercised by its Marabout seg-

53. David P. Gamble, *Contributions to a Socio-Economic Survey of the Gambia* (London, 1949), p. 118.

54. CO/87/55, O'Connor to Newcastle, 8 June 1853; CO/87/53, MacDonnell to Pakington, 16 July 1852.

ment led by the almami, Fode Kari. In defiance of the mansa, Sabajy was fortified with a stockade, trenches, and thick mud walls.

By 1853 the Soninke state was clearly collapsing. The leader of the Muslim forces in the south was Fode Kaba; in the north it was a "Moor" named Omar. Reinforced by supplies of arms from sympathizers among the community of petty traders in the British settlement at Bathurst and by the military skills of the Moor, who, according to the French, had served as an officer in "Abd-el-Kader's" army in Algeria during the revolts there in 1847, the Marabouts were in the stronger position.⁵⁵

Before the Marabouts could sweep through the kingdom, however, British colonists established on an island adjacent to Combo intervened, destroying Sabajy and signing a treaty with the mansa. In 1855 Sabajy was again attacked by the British who were fearful of the revolution spreading so close to their settlement and sympathetic to Soninke rule. No attempt was made at this time to establish a British alternative to Marabout rule in Combo and the situation festered, the issues unresolved, as each side continued to raid the other. Finally, in 1875, the last mansa capitulated, converted and shaved his head, and accepted a grant of land from the Marabouts. In 1894, after a fiercely contested military invasion, the British destroyed the Marabout state and annexed the kingdom to the British colony of the Gambia.

The population of Combo involved in this struggle was Mandingo. Fugitives from Sabajy in 1853 fled to Mandingo Marabout communities in neighboring south-bank states. At that time the Mansa Niumi offered help to the Soninkes against the rebels. Neither side, however, yet possessed the leadership or means to mobilize sympathizers elsewhere in the river states until the British, as allies of the Soninke rulers, again intervened in 1861 on the north bank of the river and opened up the opportunity for a mobilization of Marabout dissatisfaction throughout the Gambia states.

55. CO/87/60, O'Connor to Russell, 17 August 1855; CO/87/55, O'Connor to Newcastle, 8 June 1853; CO/87/53, MacDonnell to Pakington, 16 July 1852.

4

The European Settlements

Soon after the outbreak of disturbances between Soninkes and Marabouts in Combo, a group of the English residents of Bathurst, the principal British settlement on the Gambia, decided during a day's outing to visit Sabajy, a town in Combo on the south bank where there was said to be a very large mosque. As their guest they took with them the Reverend Thomas Poole, an Anglican priest who was writing a two-volume account of life in Sierra Leone and the Gambia Colony. The party set out in very good spirits, and after crossing the small creek separating St. Mary's Island from mainland Combo they traveled some 13 miles through the forest to Sabajy and rode up to the door of the mosque. It was a large round wooden building with a thatched roof. To their astonishment an attendant at the door refused "with scorn and contempt" to allow them to enter the building. His vehemence only increased when they protested that Poole's position as a Christian clergyman gave him special interest in seeing it. Confused and irritated, they were debating how to press the point further when Poole's horse became entangled in some strands of cotton that were being spun nearby. This provoked "such frowns and murmurings" from the crowd which was gathering that the party made a hasty retreat back to Bathurst fearing they might "even" be attacked.¹ The incident was so completely unforeseen that, although unimportant in itself, it indicates a great deal about relations between the Euro-

1. T. E. Poole, *Life, Scenery and Customs in Sierra Leone and the Gambia*, 2 vols. (London, 1850), II, 224.